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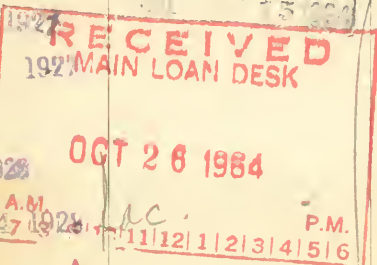
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A GOOD FIGHT

BY

CHARLES READE

THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF

THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ANDREW LANG

THE
CLOISTER
AND
THE
HEARTH

LONDON

HENRY FROWDE

1910

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INTRODUCTION

A Good Fight, by Charles Reade, is here for the first time published as a separate book, with the illustrations; though, with a few changes, *A Good Fight*, as far as chapter xxvii, is represented by the twenty-three first chapters of the author's long novel, *The Cloister and the Hearth*. It is not certain that Reade, when he planned *A Good Fight*, meant it to be a rather short, not a full-blown novel, though his own words convey that impression, as we shall see. In any case, the history of the tale is curious, and carries us back through fifty years, while the source of the outline of the narrative—accepted by Reade as historically true—raises interesting questions.

In 1859, Charles Dickens quarrelled with Messrs. Bradbury & Evans, the publishers of his cheap popular serial, *Household Words*. The feud arose out of Dickens's separation from his wife, and the refusal of Bradbury & Evans to publish, in *Punch*, something which the novelist wanted them to insert. After the rupture, Dickens founded a new popular weekly, *All the Year Round*, and Messrs. Bradbury & Evans brought out 'Once a Week, an Illustrated Miscellany of Literature, Art, Science, and Popular Information'. As proprietors of *Punch* they were connected with

the best artists in black and white. Their first number (July 2) opened with a charming vignette and two larger drawings, all full of pretty girls from the pencil of John Leech, in illustration of verses by the very clever Shirley Brooks. Then came popular science, with 'Man among the Mammoths'. It was revealed to the sceptical public that palaeolithic chipped flints really are of ancient human making, as M. Boucher de Perthes had scandalized science by averring, in 1847. But it was not yet admitted that palaeolithic man was what Mr. E. B. Tylor sweetly records of him in verse :

' But the mild anthropologist,—*he's*
 Not *recent* inclined to suppose
 Flints palaeolithic like these,
 Quaternary bones such as those !
 In Rhinoceros, Mammoth, and Co.'s
 First epoch, the Human began
 Theologians all to expose,
 'Tis the *mission* of Primitive Man ! '

Once a Week did not think these facts ' absolutely proved ' in 1859.

There was, next, in the first number, a snatch from a saga by Sir G. W. Dasent ; an illustration by Tenniel ; an essay on projectiles, from the arrow to the rifle—indicating, *déjà*, distrust in the bayonet ; a poem illustrated by Millais ; and finally *A Good Fight*, by Charles Reade, with the admirable designs of Charles Keene, reproduced in this edition.

The paper continued to be illustrated by the artists

named, and also by Frederick Walker, F. Sandys, M. J. Lawless, H. K. Browne (Phiz), and George du Maurier. But the paper was, in its art, too good for the public, while a novel by Mr. George Meredith (*Evan Harrington*) lowered its circulation, though illustrated by Charles Keene.

The truth is that the novels in *Once a Week* were not what the public liked. *A Good Fight* ended in October, and no long serial (by Mrs. Henry Wood, for example) was ready to follow. This looks as if the close of the story were premature and unexpected: no other novel was ready to take its place.

Reade made *A Good Fight* end happily; the hero and heroine are duly married. He later added, in the proportion of four-fifths, new matter to the tale, and published it as *The Cloister and the Hearth*, which Sir Walter Besant, Mr. Swinburne, and other people, thought a masterpiece in the way of an historical novel. Reade writes, 'I took wider views of the subject, and also felt uneasy at having deviated, *unnecessarily*, from the historical outline of a true story,' which, true or untrue, ended badly; Gerard becoming a priest when he hears, in Italy, a false report of Margaret's death. Their one child, Erasmus, is thus illegitimate.

Now is there any truth at all in this tale about the parents of Erasmus? What is the source of the tale? Reade says: 'There is a musty chronicle' (to the novelist a chronicle is necessarily 'musty'), 'written in tolerable Latin,' and *that* is his source.

Where is that 'chronicle'; what is its date; who is its author? Reade does not tell us; his public did not want to know; nobody does know. 'Wanting to know, don't you know!' I turned to Mr. Froude, whose work on Erasmus was recommended to me, by a librarian, as 'the best'. Mr. Froude, in his lectures on Erasmus delivered from the Chair of History at Oxford, speaks as if the story were the result of a *Volksetymologie*, a myth invented to explain the name 'Erasmus' (the right form of the word is 'Erasmius'): 'Legend says that Erasmus was what is called a love-child.' Mr. Froude then gives a summary of the tale as told by Charles Reade. 'It grew up out of tradition when Erasmus had become famous, and his enemies liked to throw a slur upon his parentage. It is perhaps a lie altogether, perhaps only partly a lie. The difficulty is that Erasmus says distinctly that he was a second child, and had a brother three years older than himself.' Where, in what part of his works, Erasmus tells us these facts, Mr. Froude does not say. Now I have a craving for exact references. 'There is no suggestion of any previous marriage' (of either of Erasmus's parents) 'with another person. The connexion of his father and mother must therefore have been of long continuance. Erasmus's own letters are the only trustworthy authority for his early life.'

Thus Mr. Froude rejects an autobiography attributed to Erasmus, and said to have been entrusted by him to Conrad Goclenius, a friend and a scholar.

An autobiography may be as musty as you please, but an autobiography is not 'a musty chronicle', such as Reade declares to be his source.

I now turned to John Jortin's *Erasmus*, a book of 1758. An historian of 1758, I thought, will not be too high and mighty to give authorities for his statements. Jortin gave plenty, but not one of them, in this part of his book, was either a musty chronicle or an autobiography by Erasmus himself, or a document or MS. contemporary with Erasmus. Jortin *did* refer, but not for the story as told by Reade, to '*Compend. Vit. Erasmi*'. He wrote this Compendium himself'.

If he did, Mr. Froude was manifestly unaware of, or was incredulous of the fact. For the story of the loves of Gerard and Margaret, which Jortin tells as Reade does, but with the unhappy *dénouement*, Jortin referred to Bayle,—and how did Bayle get at the deplorable facts?

This bewildered inquirer, wearied out by the total absence of references in Reade, Froude, and Jortin, turned to Bayle. Now Bayle says that the story of Gerard and Margaret comes from 'a so-called' Life of Erasmus by Erasmus, a Life 'wretchedly written'. Erasmus did not write wretchedly, to do so was not his foible, and if he wrote in Latin, it was necessarily better than the 'tolerable Latin' of Reade's 'musty' (and anonymous) 'chronicle'. Moreover, Bayle names the mother of Erasmus 'Elizabeth', not Margaret (just as one document of Erasmus's time calls his father not Gerard but Roger!) The manuscript of

the Life, entrusted, says Bayle, to Conrad Goelenius, was not published till 1607. I took leave, with Mr. Froude, to doubt every word of the story in this *Compend. Vit. Erasmi*. I did not feel so sure as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, that Erasmus was illegitimate. But the story, as given by Reade, and in the *Compend. Vit.*, does not seem to me to come, as Mr. Froude says, from the enemies of Erasmus ; rather the reverse.

The story, on the other side, seems to be a palliation of a tale that Erasmus was ' a priest's geat '. Gerard became a priest, says the tale, on false information of Margaret's death, *after* he was the father of Erasmus.

There was nothing unusual (in Scotland at least) in priestly concubinage, and if Erasmus had, as he says, an elder brother, that does not necessarily prove that his father and mother were married people. It does disprove the romantic story, if it be true, but we have no evidence at all. Yet, surely, had the story of the illegitimacy of Erasmus—be his father priest or layman—been true, or even alleged to be true, it would appear in the writings of his enemies during his lifetime. They were—every polemist then was—capable of inventing the story, yet it is not quoted from any contemporary.

Thus Reade, as far as I see, need not have been uneasy about the deviation from historical truth in the happy ending of *A Good Fight*. There is no history to be deviated from ; and a happy ending is worth much

X (and costs nothing. Meanwhile, one fact is certain. If Erasmus had an elder brother, as he alleges, the circumstance may be explained in a variety of ways, according to the taste and fancy of him who explains. But it is absolutely impossible that, if Erasmus were right in his belief that he had an elder brother—or any brother; even a brother by the half blood—any form of the myth on which either the *Cloister and the Hearth*, or *A Good Fight*, is based, should be historically true. For, if the brother were the elder, whether he was the son of Gerard by Margaret, or of Margaret by somebody else, the story is untrue. If he were the son of Gerard, whether by Margaret or another, the story is untrue. If the brother (contrary to the statement of Erasmus) were the junior—whether he were the son of Gerard and Margaret, or of one or the other of the pair—the story, on the lines of *The Cloister and the Hearth*, is untrue. It could only be true on the lines (given Gerard as the father) of *A Good Fight*, and Reade declared these lines to be of his own invention.

As Reade quotes his ‘musty chronicle’, ‘where every sentence holds a fact,’ for *both* of his contradictory versions, we must regretfully admit that his accuracy as a logician and an historian leaves much to be desired. To a Homeric critic of the fashionable school, all this would only prove that the author of *A Good Fight* and of *The Cloister and the Hearth*, were, in fact, not one author, but two or more authors. On the other hand, all the external evidence demonstrates that both books

were by one author, Charles Reade, Fellow of Magdalen College, in the University of Oxford.

I had arrived at these conclusions—neither Reade's version of the story in *A Good Fight*, nor his version in *The Cloister and the Hearth* can be true; when a fortunate accident brought me acquainted with a truly scholarly and trustworthy work concerning Erasmus, Mr. Allen's *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi*, published by the Clarendon Press. Mr. Allen (Vol. I, Appendix 1, pp. 575-8) accepts the *Compendium* as a genuine work of Erasmus. If so, Erasmus suppresses his elder brother, Peter, 'a suppression which is the more pardonable, since by so doing he could place the relations of his parents in a better light: ' namely, in the light which shines on them in *The Cloister and the Hearth*. But Peter cannot be suppressed: and the fraud of Erasmus, if we accept his authorship of the *Compendium*, is pious, indeed, perhaps, pardonable, but not prosperous. Whether his father, Gerard, became a priest, when he heard the false news of his Margaret's death, or not, he certainly did not cease to be her lover, for by her, after the birth of Peter, he became the father of her celebrated son, Erasmus. From a letter of Erasmus to Rome, it appears that his birth really was not legitimate, and that he therefore needed dispensations for certain purposes. Without papal dispensation he could not hold a benefice, if he got one, supposing his birth to be illegitimate. Now in 1505 he hoped to get a benefice in England. He applied to Rome for a dispensation, and from the

reply (Rome, January 4, 1506, N. S.) he had described himself as the son of a bachelor, a laic, *and of a widow*. If this were true, who was the father of his elder brother, Peter? Peter is named 'Peter Gerardson'; if he be correctly so called, had the bachelor two sons by the widow, Margaret, or had Peter some other mother?

The affair is too ramified for me, and was too ramified for Erasmus. He appears to have been utterly puzzled. He received another dispensation in 1517, and in that he is said 'to be born of an unlawful, and, as he is apt to fear, of a condemned and unholy union' (*ex illicito et, ut timet, incesto damnatoque coitu genitus*). This description, says Mr. Allen, 'suggests that he may in the interval' (1505-17) 'have learned more about the circumstances of his birth; while, as Vischer notes, it also implies some uncertainty remaining in his mind as to the date when his father took orders' (*English Historical Review*, January 1910, pp. 123-5).

By 1524, when Erasmus wrote the *Compendium Vitae Suae*, he had made up his mind how he would arrange the story: he dropped Peter, he dropped the widow, and he provided Reade with a plot. All this follows, if Erasmus wrote the *Compendium*.

This conclusion is not universally accepted, but on the evidence given by Mr. Allen I am constrained to accept the *Compendium* as an authentic, though not quite veracious sketch of the early life of Erasmus by himself, despite the casual Latinity.

However, all these considerations are beside the

mark, for the real question is, What are the human and literary merits of *A Good Fight* ? That question must be answered by the reader, from whom, if he does not care for the tale, I must take the liberty of dissenting. To adopt the prescientificcritical method of Thackeray, *Amo* Giles, *amo* Margaret, *amo* Martin (especially Martin), *amo* the wife of Gerard's father, *amo* Philip of Burgundy, called 'the Good', despite his attitude to Jeanne d'Arc, which is not before the Court. *Amo* Sybrandt, Cornelis, and even little Kate, an ancestress obviously, of Dickens's Little Nell (though, humanly speaking, this is impossible).

Enfin, here we have a vigorous story of human action and passion, told with all the vivacity, and rich in the personal peculiarities of the author. The manner is frankly modern ; there are no 'tusherries' (as R. L. Stevenson called them); there is no Wardour Street English. The love scenes are movingly sympathetic. The adventures succeed each other with breathless rapidity, though this is not a mere novel of adventures, but a novel of character and of historical surroundings.

A GOOD FIGHT

BY

CHARLES READE

1859



CHAPTER I

Not a day passes over the earth but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrows. Of these obscure heroes, philosophers, and martyrs, the greater part will never be known till that day, when many that are great shall be small, and the small great : but of others the world's knowledge may be said to sleep. Their lives and characters lie hidden from nations in the very annals that record them. The general reader cannot feel them, they are presented so curtly and coldly : they are not like breathing stories appealing to his heart, but little historic hailstones striking him only to glance off his bosom : nor can he understand them ; for epitomes are not narratives, as skeletons are not human figures.

Thus records of prime truths sometimes remain a dead letter to plain folk ; the writers have left so much to the imagination, and imagination is so rare a gift. Here, then, the writer of fiction may be of use to the public—as an interpreter.

There is a musty chronicle, written in tolerable Latin, and in it a chapter where every sentence holds a fact. Here is told, with harsh brevity, the strange history of a pair, who lived untrumpeted, and died unsung, four hundred years ago ; and lie now, as unpitied, in that stern page, as fossils in a rock. Thus, living or dead, fate is still unjust to them. Yet if I can but show you what is involved in that dry chronicler's

words, methinks you will correct the indifference of centuries, and give those two sore-tried souls a place in your heart—for a few weeks.

It was past the middle of the fifteenth century, Louis XI was sovereign of France ; Edward IV was wrongful King of England ; and Philip ‘ the Good ’, having by force and cunning dispossessed his cousin Jacqueline, and broken her heart, reigned undisturbed this many years in Holland, where our tale begins.

Gerard, and Catherine his wife, lived in the little town of Tergou. He traded, wholesale and retail, in cloth, silk, brown holland, and, above all, in curried leather, a material highly valued by the middling people, because it would stand twenty years’ wear, and turn a knife if not fresh sharpened ; no small virtue in a jerkin of that century, in which folk were so liberal of their steel : even at dinner a man would leave his meat awhile, and carve you his neighbour, on a very moderate difference of opinion.

The couple were well to do, and would have been free from all earthly care, but for nine children. When these were coming into the world, one per annum, each was hailed with rejoicings, and the saints were thanked, not expostulated with ; and when parents and children were all young together, the latter were looked upon as lovely little playthings invented by Heaven for the amusement, joy, and evening solace, of people in business.

But as the olive branches shot up, and the parents grew older, and saw with their own eyes the fate of large families, misgivings and care mingled with their love. They belonged to a singularly wise and provident people : in Holland reckless parents were as rare as disobedient children. So now when the huge loaf came in on a gigantic trencher, looking like a fortress

in its moat, and, the tour of the table once made, seemed to have melted away, Gerard and Catherine would look at one another and say, ' Who is to find bread for them all when we are gone ? '

At this observation the younger ones needed all their filial respect, to keep their little Dutch countenances ; for in their humble opinion dinner and supper came by nature like sunrise and sunset, and, so long as that luminary should travel round the earth, so long *must* the brown loaf go round their family circle, and set in their stomachs only to rise again in the family oven. But the remark awakened the national thoughtfulness of the elder boys, and being often repeated set several of the family thinking, some of them good thoughts, some ill thoughts, according to the nature of the thinkers.

' Kate, the children grow so, this table will soon be too small.'

' We cannot afford it, Gerard,' replied Catherine, answering not his words, but his thought, after the manner of women.

Their anxiety for the future took at times a less dismal but more mortifying turn. The free burghers had their pride as well as the nobles ; and these two could not bear that any of their blood should go down in the burgh after their decease.

So by prudence and self-denial they managed to clothe all the little bodies, and feed all the great mouths, and yet put by a small hoard to meet the future ; and, as it grew, and grew, they felt a pleasure the miser hoarding for himself knows not.

One day the eldest boy but one, aged nineteen, came to his mother, and, with that outward composure which has so misled some persons as to the real nature of this people, begged her to intercede with his father to send him to Amsterdam, and

place him with a merchant. 'It is the way of life that likes me: merchants are wealthy; I am good at numbers; prithee, good mother, take my part in this, and I shall ever be, as I am now, your debtor.'

Catherine threw up her hands with dismay and incredulity. 'What, leave Tergou!'

'What is one street to me more than another? If I can leave the folk of Tergou, I can surely leave the stones.'

'What! abandon your poor father now he is no longer young?'

'Mother, if I can leave you, I can leave him.'

'What, leave your poor brothers and sisters, that love you so dear?'

'There are enough in the house without me.'

'What mean you, Richart? Who is more thought of than you? Stay, have I spoken sharp to you? Have I been unkind to you?'

'Never that I know of; and if you had, you should never hear of it from me. Mother,' said Richart gravely, but the tear was in his eye, 'it all lies in a word. And nothing can change my mind. There will be one mouth less for you to feed.'

'There now, see what my tongue has done,' said Catherine, and the next moment she began to cry. For she saw her first young bird on the edge of the nest trying his wings, to fly into the world. Richart had a calm, strong will, and she knew he never wasted a word.

It ended as nature has willed all such discourse shall end: young Richart went to Amsterdam with a face so long and sad as it had never been seen before, and a heart like granite.

That afternoon at supper there was one mouth less. Catherine looked at Richart's chair and wept bitterly.

On this Gerard shouted roughly and angrily to the children, 'Sit wider! can't ye: sit wider!' and turned his head away over the back of his seat awhile, and was silent.

Richart was launched; and never cost them another penny: but to fit him out and place him in the house of Vander Stegen the merchant took all the little hoard but one gold crown. They began again. Two years passed. Richart found a niche in commerce for his brother Jacob, and Jacob left Tergou directly after dinner, which was at eleven in the forenoon. At supper that day Gerard remembered what had happened the last time; so he said in a low whisper, 'Sit wider, dears!' Now until that moment Catherine *would* not see the gap at table, for her daughter Catherine had besought her not to grieve to-night and she had said, 'No, sweetheart, I promise I will not, since it vexes my children.' But when Gerard whispered 'Sit wider!' says she, 'Aye! the table will soon be too big for the children: and you thought it would be too small:' and having delivered this with forced calmness, she put up her apron the next moment, and wept sore.

''Tis the best that leave us,' sobbed she, 'that is the cruel part.'

'Nay! nay!' said Gerard, 'our children are good children, and all are dear to us alike. Heed her not! What God takes from us still seems better than what He spares to us: that is to say, men are by nature unthankful—and women silly.'

'And I say Richart and Jacob were the flower of the flock,' sobbed Catherine.

The little coffer was empty again, and to fill it they gathered like ants. In those days speculation was pretty much confined to the card-and-dice business. Gerard knew no way to wealth but the slow and sure

one. 'A penny saved is a penny gained,' was his humble creed. All that was not required for the business, and the necessities of life, went into the little coffer with steel bands and florid key. They denied themselves in turn the humblest luxuries, and then, catching one another's looks, smiled; perhaps with a greater joy than self-indulgence has to bestow. And so in three years more they had gleaned enough to set up their fourth son as a master tailor, and their eldest daughter as a robe-maker, in Tergou. Here were two more provided for: their own trade would enable them to throw work into the hands of this pair. But the coffer was drained to the dregs, and this time the shop too bled a little in goods if not in coin.

Alas! there remained on hand two that were unable to get their bread, and two that were unwilling. The unable ones were, 1, Giles, a dwarf, of the wrong sort, half stupidity, half malice, all head and claws and voice, run from by dogs and unprejudiced females, and sided with through thick and thin by his mother; 2, Little Catherine, a poor girl that could only move on crutches. She lived in pain, but smiled through it, with her marble face and violet eyes and long silky lashes: and fretful or repining word never came from her lips. The unwilling ones were Sybrandt, the youngest, a ne'er-do-weel, too much in love with play to work, and Cornelis, the eldest, who had made calculations of his own, and stuck to the hearth, waiting for dead men's shoes. Almost worn out by their repeated efforts, and above all dispirited by the moral and physical infirmities of those that now remained on hand, the anxious couple would often say, 'What will become of all these when we shall be no longer here to take care of them?' But when they had said this a good many times, suddenly the domestic horizon cleared, and then they used still to

say it, because a habit is a habit, but they uttered it half mechanically now instead of despondently, and added brightly and cheerfully, 'but thanks to St. Bavon and all the saints, there's Gerard!!'

CHAPTER II

YOUNG Gerard was for many years of his life a son apart and distinct; object of no fears and no great hopes. No fears; for he was going into the Church; and the Church could always maintain her children by hook or by crook in those days: no great hopes, because his family had no interest with the great to get him a benefice, and the young man's own habits were frivolous, and, indeed, such as our cloth merchant would not have put up with in any one but a clerk that was to be. His two main trivialities were reading and penmanship, and he was so wrapt up in them that often he could hardly be got away to his meals. The day was never long enough for him: and he carried ever a tinder-box and brimstone matches, and begged ends of candles of the neighbours, which he lighted at unreasonable hours—aye, even at eight of the clock at night in winter, when the very Burgo-master was a-bed. Endured at home, his practices were encouraged by the monks of a neighbouring convent. They had taught him penmanship, and continued to teach him, until one day they discovered, in the middle of a lesson, that he was teaching them. They pointed this out to him in a merry way: he hung his head and blushed: he had suspected as much himself, but mistrusted his judgment in that matter. 'But, my son,' said an elderly monk, 'how is it that you, to whom God has given an eye so true, a hand so supple yet firm, and a love of these beautiful

crafts, how is it you do not colour as well as write ? a scroll looks but barren unless a border of fruit, and leaves, and rich arabesques surround the good words, and charm the sense as those do the soul and understanding ; to say nothing of the pictures of holy men and women departed, with which the several chapters should be adorned, and not alone the eye soothed with the brave and sweetly blended colours, but the heart lifted by effigies of the saints in glory. Answer me, my son.'

At this Gerard was confused, and muttered that he had made several trials at illuminating, but had not succeeded well ; and thus the matter rested.

Soon after this a fellow enthusiast came on the scene in the unwonted form of an old lady. Margaret, sister and survivor of the brothers Van Eyck, left Flanders, and came to end her days in her native country. She bought a small house near Tergou. In course of time she heard of Gerard, and saw some of his handiwork : it pleased her so well that she sent her female servant, Richt Heynes, to ask him to come to her. This led to an acquaintance : it could hardly be otherwise, for little Tergou had never held so many as two zealots of this sort before. At first the old lady damped Gerard's courage terribly. At each visit she pulled out of holes and corners drawings and paintings, some of them by her own hand, that seemed to him unapproachable : but if the artist overpowered him, the woman kept his heart up. She and Richt soon turned him inside out like a glove. Among other things, they drew from him what the good monks had failed to hit upon, the reason why he did not illuminate, viz. that he could not afford the gold, the blue, and the red, but only the cheap earths ; and that he was afraid to ask his mother to buy the choice colours, and was sure he

should ask her in vain. Then Margaret Van Eyck gave him a little brush-gold, and some vermilion, and ultramarine, and a piece of good vellum to lay them on. He almost adored her. As he left the house Richt ran after him with a candle and two quarters : he quite kissed her. But better even than the gold and lapis lazuli to the illuminator was the sympathy to the isolated enthusiast. That sympathy was always ready, and, as he returned it, an affection sprung up between the old painter and the young caligrapher that was doubly characteristic of the time. For this was a century in which the fine arts and the higher mechanical arts were not separated by any distinct boundary, nor were those who practised them : and it was an age in which artists sought out and loved one another. Should this last statement stagger a painter or writer of our day, let me remind him that Christians loved one another at first starting.

Backed by an acquaintance so venerable, and strengthened by female sympathy, Gerard advanced in learning and skill. His spirits, too, rose visibly : he still looked behind him when dragged to dinner in the middle of an initial G ; but once seated showed great social qualities : likewise a gay humour, that had hitherto but peeped in him, shone out, and often he set the table in a roar, and kept it there, sometimes with his own wit, sometimes with jests which were glossy new to his family, being drawn from antiquity.

As a return for all he owed his friends the monks, he made them exquisite copies from two of their choicest MSS., viz. the life of their founder, and their Comedies of Terence, the monastery finding the vellum.

The high and puissant Prince, Philip ‘ the Good ’, Duke of Burgundy, Luxemburg, and Brabant, Earl

of Holland and Zealand, Lord of Friesland, Count of Flanders, Artois, and Hainault, Lord of Salins and Macklyn—was versatile.

He could fight as well as any king going ; and he could lie as well as any except the King of France. He was a mighty hunter, and could read and write. His tastes were wide and ardent. He loved jewels like a woman, and gorgeous apparel. He dearly loved maids of honour, and paintings generally ; in proof of which he ennobled Jan Van Eyck. He had also a particular fancy for giants, dwarfs, and Turks ; these last he had ever about him, turbaned, and blazing with jewels. His agents inveigled them from Istamboul with fair promises : but the moment he had got them he baptized them by brute force in a large tub ; and, this done, let them squat with their faces towards Mecca, and invoke Mahound as much as they pleased, laughing in his sleeve at their simplicity in fancying they were still infidels. He had lions in cages, and fleet leopards trained by orientals to run down hares and deer. In short, he relished all rarities, except humdrum virtues. For anything singularly pretty, or diabolically ugly, this was your customer. The best of him was, he was open-handed to the poor ; and the next best was, he fostered the arts in earnest : whereof he now gave a signal proof. He offered prizes for the best specimens of ‘ orfèvrerie ’ in two kinds, religious and secular ; item for the best paintings in white of egg, oils, and tempera ; these to be on panel, silk, or metal as the artists chose : item for the best transparent painting on glass : item for the best illuminating and border-painting on vellum : item for the fairest writing on vellum. The Burgomasters of the several towns were commanded to aid all the poorer competitors by receiving their specimens and sending them with due care to Rotterdam at the

expense of their several burghs. When this was cried by the bellman through the streets of Tergou, a thousand mouths opened, and one heart beat—Gerard's. He told his family he should try for two of those prizes. They stared in silence, for their breath was gone at his conceit and audacity : but one horrid laugh exploded on the floor like a petard. Gerard looked down, and there was the dwarf, whose very whisper was a bassoon, slit and fanged from ear to ear at his expense, and laughing like a lion. Nature relenting at having made Giles so small, had given him as a set-off the biggest voice on record. He was like those stunted wide-mouthed pieces of ordnance we see on fortifications ; they are more like a flower-pot than a cannon ; but ods tympana how they bellow !

Gerard turned red with anger, the more so as the others began to titter. White Catherine saw, and a pink tinge just perceptible came to her cheek. She said softly, ' Why do you laugh ? Is it because he is our brother you think he cannot be capable. Yes, Gerard, try with the rest. Many say you are skilful ; and mother and I will pray the Virgin to guide your hand.'

' Thank you, little Kate. You shall pray to our Lady, and our mother shall buy vellum and the colours to illuminate with.'

' What will they cost ?

' Two gold crowns' (about three shillings and fourpence English money).

' What ?' screamed the housewife ; ' when the bushel of rye costs but a groat ! What ! me spend a month's meal and meat and fire on such vanity as that : the lightning from Heaven would fall on me, and my children would all be beggars.'

' Mother !' sighed little Catherine, imploringly.

‘ Oh ! it is in vain, Kate,’ said Gerard, with a sigh. ‘ I shall have to give it up, or ask the dame Van Eyek. She would give it me, but I think shame to be for ever taking from her.’

‘ It is not her affair,’ said Catherine, very sharply ; ‘ what has she to do coming between me and my son ? ’ And she left the room with a red face. Little Catherine smiled. Presently the housewife returned with a gracious, affectionate air, and the two little gold pieces in her hand.

‘ There, sweetheart,’ said she, ‘ you won’t have to trouble dame or demoiselle for two paltry crowns.’

But on this Gerard fell a thinking how he could spare her purse.

‘ One will do, mother. I will ask the good monks to let me send my copy of their “ Terence ” : it is on snowy vellum, and I can write no better : so then I shall only need six sheets of vellum for my borders and miniatures, and gold for my ground, and prime colours—one crown will do.’

‘ Never spoil the ship for want of a bit of tar, Gerard,’ said this changeable mother. But she added, ‘ Well, there, I will put the crown in my pocket. That won’t be like putting it back in the box. Going to the box to take out instead of putting in—it is like going to my heart with a knife for so many drops of blood. You will be sure to want it, Gerard. The house is never built for less than the builder counted on.’

Sure enough, when the time came, Gerard longed to go to Rotterdam and see the Duke, and above all to see the work of his competitors, and so get a lesson from defeat. And the crown came out of the housewife’s pocket with a very good grace. Gerard would soon be a priest. It seemed hard if he might not enjoy the world a little before separating himself from it for life.

The day before he went, Margaret Van Eyck asked him to take a letter for her, and when he came to look at it, somewhat to his surprise he found it was addressed to the Princess Marie, at the Stadthouse, in Rotterdam.

The day before the prizes were to be distributed, Gerard started for Rotterdam thus equipped ; he had a doublet of silver-grey cloth with sleeves, and a jerkin of the same over it, but without sleeves. From his waist to his heels he was clad in a pair of tight-fitting buckskin hose fastened by laces (called points) to his doublet. His shoes were pointed, in moderation, and secured by a strap that passed under the hollow of the foot. On his head and the back of his neck he wore his flowing hair, and pinned to his back between his shoulders was his hat : it was further secured by a purple silk ribbon little Kate had passed round him from the sides of the hat, and knotted neatly on his breast ; below his hat, attached to the upper rim of his broad waist belt, was his leathern wallet. When he got within a league of Rotterdam he was pretty tired, but he soon fell in with a pair that were more so. He found an old man sitting by the roadside quite worn out, and a comely young woman holding his hand, with a face full of concern. The country people trudged by and noticed nothing amiss : but Gerard, as he passed, drew conclusions. Even dress tells a tale to those who study it so closely as our illuminator was wont to. The old man wore a gown, and a fur tippet, and a velvet cap, sure signs of dignity : but the triangular purse at his girdle was lean, the gown rusty, the fur worn, sure signs of poverty. The young woman was dressed in plain russet cloth : yet snow-white lawn covered that part of her neck the gown left visible, and ended half way up her white throat in a little band of gold

embroidery : and her head-dress was new to Gerard ; instead of hiding her hair in a pile of linen or lawn, she wore an open network of silver cord with silver spangles at the interstices : in this her glossy auburn hair was rolled in front into a solid wave, and supported behind in a luxurious and shapely mass. His quick eye took in all this, and the old man's deadly pallor, and the tears in the young woman's eyes. So when he had passed them a few yards, he reflected, and turned back, and came towards them bashfully.

‘ Father, I fear you are tired.’

‘ Indeed, my son, I am,’ replied the old man ; ‘ and faint for lack of food.’

Gerard's address did not appear so agreeable to the girl as to the old man. She seemed ashamed, and with much reserve in her manner said, that it was her fault ; she had underrated the distance, and imprudently allowed her father to start too late in the day.

‘ No ! no !’ said the old man ; ‘ it is not the distance, it is the want of nourishment.’

The girl put her arms round his neck, with tender concern, but took that opportunity of whispering, ‘ Father, a stranger—a young man !’

But it was too late. Gerard, with great simplicity, and quite as a matter of course, fell to gathering sticks with great expedition. This done, he took down his wallet, out with the manchet of bread and the iron flask his careful mother had put up, and his everlasting tinder-box ; lighted a match, then a candle end, then the sticks ; and put his iron flask on it. Then down he went on his stomach and took a good blow : then looking up, he saw the girl's face had thawed, and she was looking down at him and his energy with a demure smile. He laughed back to her : ‘ Mind the pot,’ said he, ‘ and don't let it spill, for Heaven's sake : there 's a cleft stick to hold it safe with ;’ and with

this he set off running towards a cornfield at some distance. Whilst he was gone, there came by, on a mule with rich purple housings, an old man redolent with wealth. The purse at his girdle was plethoric, the fur on his tippet was ermine, broad and new.

It was Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, the Burgomaster of Tergou. He was old, and his face furrowed. He was a notorious miser, and looked one generally. But the idea of supping with the Duke raised him just now into manifest complacency. Yet at the sight of the faded old man and his bright daughter sitting by a fire of sticks, the smile died out of his face, and he wore a strange look of anguish and wrath. He reined in his mule. 'Why, Peter,—Margaret—' said he almost fiercely, 'what mummary is this!' Peter was going to answer, but Margaret interposed hastily, and said: 'My father was exhausted, so I am warming something to give him strength before we go on.' 'What, reduced to feed by the roadside like the Bohemians,' said Ghysbrecht, and his hand went into his purse: but it did not seem at home there, it fumbled uncertainly, afraid too large a coin might stick to a finger and come out.

At this moment, who should come bounding up but Gerard. He had two straws in his hand, and he threw himself down by the fire, and relieved Margaret of the cooking part: then suddenly recognizing the Burgomaster, he coloured all over. Ghysbrecht Van Swieten started and glared at him, and took his hand out of his purse. 'Oh,' said he, bitterly, 'I am not wanted:' and went slowly on, casting a long look of suspicion on Margaret, and hostility on Gerard, that was not very intelligible. However, there was something about it that Margaret could read enough to blush at, and almost toss her head. Gerard only stared with surprise. 'By St. Bavon, I think the old miser

grudges us three our quart of soup,' said he. When the young man put that interpretation on Ghysbrecht's strange and meaning look, Margaret was greatly relieved, and smiled gaily on the speaker.

Meantime Ghysbrecht plodded on more wretched in his wealth than these in their poverty. And the curious thing is that the mule, the purple housings, and one-half the coin in that plethoric purse belonged not to Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, but to that faded old man and that comely girl, who sat by a roadside fire to be fed by a stranger. They did not know this, but Ghysbrecht knew it, and carried in his heart a scorpion of his own begetting. That scorpion is remorse; the remorse that, not being penitence, is incurable, and ready for fresh misdeeds upon a fresh temptation.

Twenty years ago, when Ghysbrecht Van Swieten was a hard but honest man, the touchstone opportunity came to him, and he did an act of heartless roguery. It seemed a safe one. It had hitherto proved a safe one, though he had never felt safe. To-day he has seen youth, enterprise, and, above all, knowledge, seated by fair Margaret and her father on terms that look familiar and loving.

And the fiends are at his ear again.

CHAPTER III

'THE soup is hot,' said Gerard.

'But how are we to swallow it?' inquired the senior, despondingly.

'Father, the young man has brought us straws.' And Margaret smiled slily.

'Aye, aye!' said the old man: 'but my poor bones are stiff, and indeed the fire is too hot for a body to kneel over with these short straws. St. John the Baptist! but the young man is adroit.'

For, while he stated his difficulty, Gerard removed it. He untied in a moment the knot on his breast, took his hat off his back, put three stones into the corner, then, wrapping his hand in the tail of his jerkin, whipped the flask off the fire, wedged it in between the stones, and put the hat under the old man's nose with a merry smile. The other tremulously inserted the pipe of rye-straw and sucked. Lo and behold his wan, drawn face was seen to light up more and more, till it quite glowed ; and, as soon as he had drawn a long breath :

‘ Hippocrates and Galen ! ’ he cried, ‘ ’tis a “ soupe au vin ”—the restorative of restoratives. Blessed be the nation that invented it, and the woman that made it, and the young man who brings it to fainting folk. Have a suck, my girl, while I relate to our host the history and virtues of this his sovereign compound. This corroborative, young sir, was unknown to the ancients : we find it neither in their treatises of medicine, nor in those popular narratives, which reveal many of their remedies, both in chirurgery and medicine proper. Hector, in the *Ilias*, if my memory does not play me false,—’

Margaret : ‘ Alas ! he ’s off.’

‘ — was invited by one of the ladies in the poem to drink a draught of wine ; but he declined, on the plea that he was just going into battle, and must not take aught to weaken his powers. Now, if the “ soupe au vin ” had been known in Troy, it is clear that in declining “ vinum merum ” upon that score, he would have added in the next hexameter, “ But a ‘ soupe au vin ’, madam, I will degust, and gratefully.” Not only would this have been but common civility—a virtue no perfect commander is wanting in—but not to have done it would have proved him a shallow and improvident person, quite unfit to be trusted with

the conduct of a war ; for men going into battle need sustenance and all possible support, as is proved by this—that foolish generals, bringing hungry soldiers to battle with full ones, have been defeated, in all ages, by inferior numbers. The Romans lost a great battle in the north of Italy to Hannibal the Carthaginian, by this neglect alone. Now, this divine elixir gives in one moment force to the limbs and ardour to the spirits ; and taken into Hector's body at the nick of time, would, by the aid of Phoebus, Venus, and the blessed saints, have most likely procured the Greeks a defeat. For, note how faint and weary and heart-sick I was a minute ago ; well, I suck this celestial cordial, and now behold me brave as Achilles and strong as an eagle.'

' Oh, father ! now, an eagle ! '

' Girl, I defy thee and all the world. Ready, I say, like a foaming charger, to devour the space between this and Rotterdam, and strong to combat the ills of life, even poverty and old age, which last philosophers have called the " summum malum ". Negatur ; unless the man's life has been ill-spent—which, by the by, it generally has. Now for the moderns.'

' Father ! dear father ! '

' Fear me not, girl, I will be brief, beyond measure brief. The " soupe au vin " occurs not in modern science ; but this is only one proof more, if proof were needed, that for the last few hundred years physicians have all been idiots, with their chicken broth and their decoction of gold, whereby they attribute the highest qualities to that meat which has the least juice of any meat, and to that metal which has less chemical qualities than all the metals. Mountebanks ! dunces ! homicides ! Since, then, from these no light is to be gathered, we must go to the chroniclers ; and first we find that Duguesclin, a French knight, being

about to join battle with the English—masters, at that time, of half France, and sturdy strikers by sea and land—drank, not one, but three, “*soupes au vin*,” in honour of the Blessed Trinity. This done, he charged the islanders; and, as might have been expected, killed a multitude of them, and drove the rest into the sea. But he was only the first of a long list of holy and hard-hitting ones who have, by this divine restorative, been sustentated, fortified, corroborated, and consoled.’

‘Dear father, prithee add thyself to that list before the soup cools.’ And Margaret held the hat imploringly in both hands till he inserted the straw once more.

This spared them the ‘modern instances’, and gave Gerard an opportunity of telling Margaret how proud his mother would be her soup had profited a man of learning.

‘Aye! but,’ said Margaret, ‘it would like her ill to see her son give all and take none himself. Why brought you but two straws?’

‘Fair mistress, I hoped you would let me put my lips to your straw, there being but two.’

Margaret smiled, and blushed. ‘Never beg that you may command,’ said she. ‘The straw is not mine—’tis yours: you cut it in yonder field.’

‘I cut it, and that made it mine; but, after that, your lip touched it, and that made it yours.’

‘Did it? Then I will lend it you. There—now it is yours again: *your* lip has touched it.’

‘No, it belongs to us both now. Let us divide it.’

‘By all means; you have a knife.’

‘No, I will not cut it—that would be unlucky. I’ll bite it. There. I shall keep my half: you will burn yours the moment you get home, I doubt.’

‘You know me not. I waste nothing. It is odds but I make a hairpin of it, or something.’

This answer dashed the novice Gerard instead of provoking him to fresh efforts, and he was silent. And now, the bread and soup being disposed of, the old scholar prepared to continue his journey. Then came a little difficulty : Gerard the adroit could not tie his ribbon again as Catherine had tied it. Margaret, after slyly eyeing his efforts for some time, offered to help him ; for at her age girls love to be coy and tender, saucy and gentle, by turns, and she saw she had put him out of countenance but now. Then a fair head, with its stately crown of auburn hair, glossy and glowing through silver, bowed sweetly towards him ; and, while it ravished his eye, two white supple hands played delicately upon the stubborn ribbon, and moulded it with soft and airy touches. Then a heavenly thrill ran through the innocent young man, and vague glimpses of a new world of feeling and sentiment opened on him. And these new and exquisite sensations Margaret unwittingly prolonged : it is not natural to her sex to hurry aught that pertains to the sacred toilet. Nay, when the taper fingers had at last subjugated the ends of the knot, her mind was not quite easy, till, by a manœuvre peculiar to the female hand, she had made her palm convex, and so applied it with a gentle pressure to the centre of the knot—a sweet little coaxing hand-kiss, as much as to say, ‘ Now be a good knot, and stay as you are.’ The palm-kiss was bestowed on the ribbon, but the wearer’s heart leaped to meet it.

‘ There, that is how it was,’ said Margaret, and drew back to take one last keen survey of her work ; then, looking up for simple approval of her skill, received full in her eyes a longing gaze of such ardent adoration, as made her lower them quickly and colour all over. An indescribable tremor seized her, and she retreated with downcast lashes and tell-tale cheeks,

and took her father's arm on the opposite side. Gerard, blushing at having scared her with his eyes, took the other arm ; and so the two young things went downcast and conscious, and propped the eagle along in silence.

They entered Rotterdam by the Schiedamse Poort ; and, as Gerard was unacquainted with the town, Peter directed him the way to the Hooch Straet, in which the Stadthouse was. He himself was going with Margaret to his cousin, in the Ooster Waagen Straet ; so almost on entering the gate, their roads lay apart. They bade each other a friendly adieu, and Gerard dived into the great town. A profound, an aching sense of solitude, fell upon him, yet the streets were crowded. Then he lamented too late that, out of delicacy, he had not asked his late companions who they were and where they lived.

‘ Beshrew my shamefacedness ! ’ said he. ‘ But their words and their breeding were above their means, and something whispered me they would not be known. I shall never see her more. Oh ! weary world, I hate you and your ways. To think I must meet beauty and goodness and learning—three pearls of price—and never see them more ! ’

Falling into this sad reverie, and letting his body go where it would, he lost his way ; but presently meeting a crowd of persons all moving in one direction, he mingled with them, for he argued they must be making for the Stadthouse. Soon the noisy troop that contained the moody Gerard emerged, not upon the Stadthouse, but upon a large meadow by the side of the Maas ; and then the attraction was at once revealed. Games of all sorts were going on : wrestling, the game of palm, the quintain, legerdemain, archery, tumbling, in which art, I blush to say, women as well as men performed, to the great delecta-

tion of the company. There was also a trained bear, which stood on his head, and stood upright and bowed with prodigious gravity to his master; and a hare that beat a drum, and a cock that strutted on little stilts disdainfully. These things made Gerard laugh now and then; but the gay scene could not really enliven it, for his heart was not in tune with it. So, hearing a young man say to his fellow that the Duke had been in the meadow, but was gone to the Stadthouse to entertain the burgomasters and aldermen and the competitors for the prizes, and their friends, he suddenly remembered he was hungry, and should like to sup with a prince. He left the river-side, and this time he found the Hooch Straet, and it speedily led him to the Stadthouse. But when he got there he was refused, first at one door, then at another, till he came to the great gate of the courtyard. It was kept by soldiers, and superintended by a pompous major-domo, glittering in an embroidered collar and a gold chain of office, and holding a white staff with a gold knob. There was a crowd of persons at the gate endeavouring to soften this official rock. They came up in turn like ripples, and retired to make way for others equally unsuccessful. It cost Gerard a struggle to get near him, and when he got within four heads of the gate, he saw something that made his heart beat: there was Peter, with Margaret on his arm, soliciting humbly for entrance.

‘My cousin the alderman is not at home. They say he is here.’

‘What is that to me, old man?’

‘If you will not let us pass in to him, at least take this leaf from my tablet to my cousin. See, I have written his name: he will come out to us.’

‘For what do you take me? I carry no messages. I keep the gate.’

He then bawled, in a stentorian voice, inexorably :

‘ No strangers enter here but the competitors and their companies.’

‘ Come, old man,’ cried a voice in the crowd, ‘ you have gotten your answer ; make way.’

Margaret turned half round imploringly :

‘ Good people ! we are come from far, and my father is old ; and my cousin has a new servant that knows us not, and would not let us sit in our cousin’s house.’

At this the crowd laughed hoarsely. Margaret shrank as if they had struck her. At that moment a hand grasped hers—such a grasp : it felt like heart meeting heart, or magnet steel. She turned quickly round at it, and it was Gerard. Such a little cry of joy and appeal came from her bosom, and she began to whimper prettily :

They had hustled her and frightened her for one thing ; and her cousin’s thoughtlessness in not even telling his servant they were coming was cruel ; and the servant’s caution, however wise and faithful to his master, was bitterly mortifying to her father and her. And to her—so mortified, and anxious, and jostled—came suddenly this kind hand and face. ‘ *Hinc illae lacrimae.*’

‘ All is well now,’ remarked a coarse humorist ; ‘ she has gotten her sweetheart.’

‘ Haw ! haw ! haw !’ went the crowd.

She dropped Gerard’s hand directly, and turned round, with eyes flashing through her tears :

‘ I have no sweetheart, you rude men. But I am friendless in your boorish town, and this is a friend ; and one who knows, what you know not, how to treat the aged and the weak.’

The crowd was dead silent. They had only been thoughtless, and now felt the rebuke, though severe,

was just. The silence enabled Gerard to treat with the porter.

‘I am a competitor, sir.’

‘What is your name?’ and the man eyed him suspiciously.

‘Gerard, the son of Gerard.’

The janitor inspected a slip of parchment he held in his hand :

‘Gerard Gerardssoen can enter.’

‘With my company—these two?’

‘Nay; those are not your company: they came before you.’

‘What matter? they are my friends, and without them I go not in.’

‘Stay without, then.’

‘That will I not.’

‘That we will see.’

‘We will, and speedily.’

Gerard then raised a voice of astounding volume and power, and shouted, so that the whole street rang :

‘HO ! PHILIP EARL OF HOLLAND !’

‘Are you mad?’

‘HERE IS ONE OF YOUR VARLETS DEFIES YOU.’

‘Hush, hush!’

‘AND WILL NOT LET YOUR GUESTS PASS IN.’

‘Hush ! murder ! The Duke’s there ! I’m dead !’ cried the janitor, quaking.

Then suddenly trying to overpower Gerard’s thunder, he shouted, with all his lungs :

‘OPEN THE GATE, YE KNAVES ! WAY THERE FOR GERARD GERARDSOEN AND HIS COMPANY ! (the fiends go with him !)’

The gate swung open as by magic. Eight soldiers lowered their pikes half way, and made an arch, under which the victorious three marched in triumphant. The moment they had passed, the pikes clashed



together horizontally to bar the gateway, and all but pinned an abdominal citizen that sought to be of Gerard's company unbidden.

Once passed the guarded portal, a few steps brought the trio upon a scene of Oriental luxury. The courtyard was laid out in tables loaded with rich meats, and literally piled with gorgeous plate. Guests in rich and various costumes sat beneath a leafy canopy of fresh-cut branches fastened tastefully to golden, silver, and blue silken cords that traversed the area; and fruits of many hues, including some artificial ones of gold, silver, and wax, hung pendant, or peeped, like fair eyes, among the green leaves of plane-trees and lime-trees. The Duke's minstrels swept their lutes at intervals, and a fountain played red Burgundy in six jets that met and battled in the air. The evening sun darted its fires through those bright and purple wine spouts, making them jets and cascades of molten rubies, then passing on, tinged with the blood of the grape, shed crimson glories here and there on fair faces, snowy beards, velvet, satin, jewelled hilts, glowing gold, gleaming silver, and sparkling glass. Gerard and his friends stood dazzled, spellbound. Presently a whisper buzzed round them, 'Salute the Duke! Salute the Duke!' They looked up, and there on high, under the dais, was their sovereign, bidding them welcome with a kindly wave of the hand. The men bowed low, and Margaret curtsied with a deep and graceful obeisance. The Duke's hand being up he gave it another turn, and pointed the new comers out to a knot of valets. Instantly seven of his people, with an obedient start, went headlong at our friends, seated them at a table, and put fifteen many-coloured soups before them, in little silver bowls, and as many wines in crystal vases.

'Nay, father, do not let us eat until we have thanked

our good friend,' said Margaret, now first recovering from all this bustle.

'Girl, he is our guardian angel.'

Gerard put his face into his hands.

'Tell me when you have done,' said he, 'and I will reappear and have my supper, for I am hungry. I know which of us three is the happiest at meeting again.'

'Me?' inquired Margaret.

'No: guess again.'

'Father?'

'No.'

'Then I have no idea which it can be;' and she gave a little crow of happiness and gaiety. The soup was tasted, and vanished in a twirl of fourteen hands, and fish came on the table in a dozen forms, with patties of lobster and almonds mixed, and of almonds and cream, and an immense variety of 'brouets', known to us as 'rissoles'. The next trifle was a wild boar, which smelt divine. Why, then, did Margaret start away from it with two shrieks of dismay, and pinch so good a friend as Gerard? Because the Duke's 'cuisinier' had been too clever; had made this excellent dish too captivating to the sight as well as taste. He had restored to the animal, by elaborate mimicry with burnt sugar and other edible colours, the hair and bristles he had robbed him of by fire and water. To make him still more enticing, the huge tusks were carefully preserved in the brute's jaw, and gave his mouth that winning smile you may have noticed as a result of tusk in man or beast, and two eyes of coloured sugar glowed in his head. St. Argus! what eyes! so bright, so blood-shot, so threatening—they followed a man and his every movement. But, indeed, I need the pencil of my artist associate to make you see the two gilt valets on the opposite

side of the table putting the monster down before our friends, with a smiling, self-satisfied, benevolent obsequiousness—for this ghastly monster was the flower of all comestibles; old Peter clasping both hands in pious admiration of it; Margaret wheeling round with horror-stricken eyes and her hand on Gerard's shoulder, squeaking and pinching; his face of foolish delight at being pinched, the grizzly brute glaring sulkily on all, and the guests grinning from ear to ear.

‘What’s to do?’ shouted the Duke, hearing the signals of distress. Seven of his people with a zealous start went headlong and told him. He laughed and said, ‘Give her of the beef-stuffing, then, and bring me Sir Boar.’ Benevolent monarch! The beef-stuffing was his own private dish.

On these grand occasions an ox was roasted whole, and reserved for the poor. But this wise as well as charitable prince had discovered, that whatever venison, hares, lamb, poultry, &c., you skewered into that beef cavern, got cooked to perfection, retaining their own juices and receiving those of the reeking ox. These he called his beef-stuffing, and took delight therein, as did now our trio; for at his word, seven of his people went headlong, and drove silver tridents into the steaming cave at random, and speared a kid, a cygnet, and a flock of wild fowl. These presently smoked before Gerard and company; and Peter’s face, profoundly sad and slightly morose at the loss of the savage hog, expanded and shone. After this, twenty different tarts of fruits and herbs, and last of all, confectionery on a Titanic scale—cathedrals of sugar, all gilt and painted in the interstices of the bas-reliefs; castles with their moats, and ditches, imitated to the life; elephants, camels, toads; knights on horseback jousting; kings and princesses

looking on ; trumpeters blowing ; and all these characters delicious eating, and their veins filled with sweet-scented juices—works of art made to be destroyed. The guests breached a bastion, crunched a crusader and his horse and lance, or cracked a bishop, cope, chasuble, crosier and all, as remorselessly as we do a carraway comfit ; sipping, meanwhile, hippocras and other spiced drinks, and Greek and Corsican wines, while every now and then little Turkish boys, turbaned, spangled, jewelled, and gilt, came offering on bended knee golden troughs of rose-water and orange-water to keep the guests' hands cool and perfumed.

But long before our party arrived at this final stage, appetite had succumbed, and one or two circumstances had occurred apparently trifling. Gerard had suddenly remembered he was the bearer of a letter to the Princess Marie, and, in an undertone, had asked one of the servants if he would undertake to deliver it. The man took it with a deep obeisance : ' He could not deliver it himself, but would instantly give it to one of the princess's suite, several of whom were about.'

It may be remembered that Peter and Margaret came here not to dine, but to find their cousin. Well, the old gentleman ate heartily, and being much fatigued dropped asleep, and forgot all about his cousin. Margaret did not remind him ; we shall hear why.

Meantime, their cousin, William Johnson, alderman of Rotterdam, was seated within a few feet of them, at their backs, and discovered them when Margaret turned round and screamed at the boar. But he did not speak to them, for the following reason. Margaret was very plainly dressed, and Peter inclined to thread-bare. So the alderman said :

' 'Twill be time to make up to them when the sun

sets and the company disperses : then I will take my poor relations to my house, and none will be the wiser.'

Half the courses were lost on Gerard and Margaret. They were no great eaters, and just now were feeding on sweet thoughts that have ever been unfavourable to appetite. And it was a relief to them when the dessert came and the valets retired a few steps, and they could talk without being overheard. But there is a delicate kind of sensuality, to whose influence these two were perhaps more sensitive than any other pair in that assembly ; the delights of colour, music, and perfume, all of which blended so fascinatingly here.

Margaret leaned back and half closed her eyes, and murmured to Gerard : ' What a lovely scene ! the warm sun, the green shade, the rich dresses, the bright music of the lutes, and the cool music of the fountain, and all faces so happy and gay ! and it is to you we owe it.'

Gerard was silent.

' Now, don't speak to me,' said Margaret, languidly, ' let me listen to the fountain : what are you a competitor for ? '

He told her.

' Very well ! You will gain one prize, at least.'

' Which ? which ? have you seen any of my work ? '

' I ? no. But you will gain a prize.'

' I hope so : but what makes you think so ? '

' Because you were so good to my father.'

Gerard smiled at the feminine logic, and hung his head at the sweet praise, and was silent.

' Don't speak,' murmured Margaret. ' They say this is a world of sin and misery. Can that be ? What is your opinion ? '

' No ! that is all a silly old song,' explained Gerard.

' 'Tis a byword our elders keep repeating out of custom—it is not true.'

' How can you know ? you are but a child,' said Margaret, with pensive dignity.

' Why only look round ! And then I thought I had lost you—for ever ; and you are by my side : and now the minstrels are going to play again. Sin and misery ? Stuff and nonsense !'

' What do you admire most of all these beautiful things, Gerard ?'

' You know my name ? How is that ?'

' White magic. I am a witch.'

' Angels are never witches. But I can't think how you—'

' Foolish boy ! was it not cried at the gate loud enough to deafen one ?'

' So it was. Where is my head ? What do I admire most ? If you will sit a little more that way, I'll tell you.'

' This way ?'

' Yes ! so that the light may fall on you. There. I see many beautiful things here, more beautiful than I could have conceived ; but the finest of all, to my eye, is your lovely hair in its silver frame, and the setting sun kissing it. It minds me of what the Vulgate praises for beauty, "*an apple of gold in a network of silver*," and, O what a pity I did not know you before I sent in my poor efforts at illuminating ! I could illuminate so much better now. I could do everything better. There, now the sun is full on it, it is like an aureole. So our Lady looked, and none since her until to-day.'

' O fie ! it is wicked to talk so. Compare a poor, coarse-favoured girl like me with the Queen of Heaven ! O Gerard ! I thought you were a good young man.'

‘ So I am. But I can’t help having eyes—and a heart—Margaret.’

‘ Gerard ? ’

‘ Don’t be angry ! ’

‘ Now, is it likely ? ’

‘ I love you.’

‘ O for shame ! you must not say that to me.’

‘ I can’t help it. I love you. I love you.’

‘ Hush, hush ! for pity’s sake ! I must not listen to such words from a stranger. I am ungrateful to call you a stranger. O how one may be mistaken ! if I had known you were so bold—’ And Margaret’s bosom began to heave, and her cheeks were covered with blushes, and she looked towards her sleeping father, very much like a timid thing that meditates actual flight.

Then Gerard was frightened at the alarm he caused. ‘ Forgive me,’ said he imploringly. ‘ How could any one help loving you ! ’

‘ Well, sir, I will *try* and forgive you—you are so good in other respects ; but then you must promise never to say you—to say *that* again.’

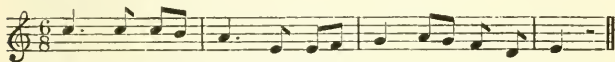
‘ Give me your hand then, or you don’t forgive me.’

She hesitated ; but eventually put out her hand a very little way, very slowly. He took it, and held it prisoner. When she thought it had been there long enough, she tried gently to draw it away. He held it tight : it submitted quite patiently to force. What is the use resisting force ? She turned her head away, and her long eyelashes drooped sweetly. Gerard lost nothing by his promise. Words were not needed here : and silence was more eloquent. Nature was in that day what she is in ours ; but manners were somewhat freer. Then, as now, virgins drew back alarmed at the first words of love ; but of prudery and artificial coquetry there was little, and the young soon read

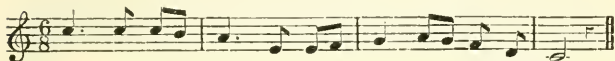
one another's hearts. Everything was in Gerard's favour : his good looks, her belief in his goodness, her gratitude ; and, at the Duke's banquet this mellow summer eve, all things disposed the female nature to tenderness ; the avenues to the heart lay open ; the senses were so soothed and subdued with lovely colours, gentle sounds, and delicate odours ; the sun gently sinking, the warm air, the green canopy, the cool music of the now violet fountain.

Gerard and Margaret sat hand in hand in silence : and Gerard's eyes sought hers lovingly ; and hers now and then turned on him timidly and imploringly : and two sweet unreasonable tears rolled down her cheeks, and she smiled deliciously ere they were dry.

And the sun declined ; and the air cooled ; and the fountain plashed more gently ; and the pair throbbed in unison, and silence, and this weary world was heaven to them.



Oh the merry days, the merry days when we were young,



Oh the merry days, the merry days when we were young.

CHAPTER IV

A GRAVE white-haired seneschal came to their table and inquired courteously whether Gerard Gerardssoen was of their company. Upon Gerard's answer, he said :

‘The Princess Marie would confer with you, young sir ; I am to conduct you to her presence.’

Instantly all faces within hearing turned sharp round, and were bent with curiosity and envy on the man that was to go to a princess.

Gerard rose to obey.

‘I wager we shall not see you again,’ said Margaret, calmly, but colouring a little.

‘That will you,’ was the reply : then he whispered in her ear. ‘This is my good princess ; but you are my queen.’ He added aloud : ‘Wait for me, I pray you, I will presently return.’

‘Aye, aye !’ said Peter, who had just awoke.

Gerard gone, the pair whose dress was so homely, yet they were with the man whom the princess sent for, became ‘the cynosure of neighbouring eyes’ ; observing which, William Johnson came forward, acted surprise, and claimed his relations :

‘And to think that there was I at your backs, and you saw me not.’

‘Pardon me, cousin Johnson, I saw you long since,’ said Margaret, coldly.

‘You saw me, and spoke not to me ?’

‘Nay, cousin, it was for you to welcome us to Rotterdam, as it is for us to welcome you at Sevenbergen. Your servant denied us a seat in your house.’

‘The idiot !’

‘And I had a mind to see whether it was “like maid like master” : for there is sooth in bywords.’

William Johnson blushed purple. He saw Margaret was keen, and suspected him. He did the wisest thing under the circumstances—trusted to deeds not words. He insisted on their coming home with him at once, and he would show them whether they were welcome to Rotterdam or not.

‘Who doubts it, cousin ? Who doubts it ?’ said the scholar.

Margaret thanked him graciously, but demurred to

go just now : said she wanted to hear the minstrels again. In about a quarter of an hour Johnson renewed his proposal, and bade her observe that many of the guests had left. Then her real reason came out.

‘ It were ill manners to our friend : and he will lose us. He knows not where we lodge in Rotterdam, and the city is large, and we have parted company once already.’

‘ Oh ! ’ said Johnson, ‘ we will provide for that. My young man, ahem ! I mean my secretary, shall sit here and wait, and bring him on to my house : he shall lodge with me and with no other.’

‘ Cousin, we shall be too burdensome.’

‘ Nay, nay ; you shall see whether you are welcome or not—you and your friends, and your friends’ friends if need be ; and I shall hear what the princess would with him.’

Margaret felt a thrill of joy that Gerard should be lodged under the same roof with her ; then she had a slight misgiving. ‘ But if your young man should be thoughtless, and go play, and Gerard miss him—’

‘ He go play ? He leave the spot where I put him, and bid him stay ? Ho ! Stand forth, Hans Cloterman.’

A figure clad in black serge and dark violet hose got up, and took two steps and stood before them without moving a muscle : a solemn, precise young man, the very statue of gravity and starched propriety. At his aspect Margaret, being very happy, could hardly keep her countenance. But she whispered Johnson, ‘ I would put my hand in the fire for him ! We are at your command, cousin. as soon as you have given him his orders.’

Hans was then instructed to sit at the table and wait for Gerard, and conduct him to Ooster-Waagen

Street. He replied, not in words, but by calmly taking the seat indicated, and Margaret, Peter, and William Johnson went with the latter.

‘ And, indeed, it is time you were abed, father, after all your travel,’ said Margaret. This had been in her mind all along.

Hans Cloterman sat waiting for Gerard, solemn and business-like. The minutes flew by, but excited no impatience in that perfect young man. Johnson did him no more than justice when he laughed to scorn the idea of his secretary leaving his post, or neglecting his duty, in pursuit of sport, or out of youthful hilarity and frivolity.

As Gerard was long in coming, the patient Hans—his employer’s eye being no longer on him—‘ *tandem custode remoto*,’ improved the time by quaffing solemnly, silently, and at short but accurately measured intervals, goblets of Corsican wine. The wine was strong, so was Cloterman’s head : and it was not until Gerard had been gone a good hour the model secretary had imbibed the notion that creation expected of Cloterman to drink the health of all good fellows, and ‘ *nommément* ’ of the Duke of Burgundy there present. With this view, he filled bumper nine, and rose gingerly but solemnly and slowly. Having reached his full height, he instantly rolled upon the grass goblet in hand, spilling the cold liquor on many an ankle, but not disturbing a muscle in his own long face, which, in the total eclipse of reason, retained its gravity, primness, and infallibility.

CHAPTER V

THE seneschal led Gerard through several passages to the door of a pavilion, where some young noblemen, embroidered and feathered, sat sentinel, guarding the heir-apparent, and playing cards by the red light of torches their servants held. A whisper from the seneschal, and one of them rose reluctantly, stared at Gerard with haughty surprise, and entered the pavilion. He presently returned, and, beckoning the pair, led them through a passage or two and landed them in an antechamber, where sat three more young gentlemen, feathered, furred, and embroidered like pieces of fancy work, and deep in that instructive and edifying branch of learning, dice.

‘ You can’t see the Princess—it is too late,’ said one.

Another followed suit :—

‘ She passed this way but now with her nurse. She is gone to bed, doll and all—deuce-ace again ! ’

Gerard prepared to retire. The seneschal, with an incredulous smile, replied :—

‘ The young man is here by the countess’s orders ; be so good as conduct him to her ladies.’

On this a superb Adonis rose, with an injured look, and led Gerard into a room where sat or lolloped eleven ladies, chattering like magpies. Two, more industrious than the rest, were playing cat’s-cradle with fingers as nimble as their tongues. At the sight of a stranger all the tongues stopped like one piece of complicated machinery, and all the eyes turned on Gerard, as if the same string that checked the tongues had turned the eyes on. Gerard was ill at ease before, but this battery of eyes discountenanced him, and down went *his* eyes on the ground. Then the cowards finding, like the hare who ran by the pond and the frogs

scuttled into the water, that there was a creature they could frighten, giggled and enjoyed their prowess. Then a duenna said, severely, 'Mesdames !' and they were abashed as one woman. This same duenna took Gerard, and marched before him in solemn silence. The young man's heart sank, and he had half a mind to turn and run out of the place. 'What must princes be,' he thought, 'when their courtiers are so freezing. Of course they take their breeding from him they serve.' These reflections were interrupted by the duenna suddenly introducing him into a room where three ladies sat working, and a pretty little girl tuning a lute. The ladies were richly but not showily dressed, and the duenna went up to the one who was hemming a kerchief, and said a few words in a low tone. This lady then turned towards Gerard, with a smile, and beckoned him to come near her. She did not rise, but she laid aside her work, and her manner of turning towards him, slight as the movement was, was full of grace and ease and courtesy. She began a conversation at once.

'Margaret Van Eyck is an old friend of mine, sir, and I am right glad to have a letter from her hand, and thankful to you, sir, for bringing it to me safely. Marie, my love, this is the young gentleman who brought you that pretty miniature.'

'Sir, I thank you a thousand times,' said the young lady.

'I am glad you feel obliged to him, sweetheart, for our friend wishes us to do him a little service in return.'

'I will do anything on earth for him,' replied the young lady, with ardour.

'Anything on earth is nothing in the world,' said the Countess of Charolois, quietly.

'Well, then, I will——What would you have me to do, sir ?'



Gerard had just found out what high society he was in. 'My sovereign demoiselle,' said he, gently and a little tremulously, 'where there have been no pains there needs no reward.'

'But we must obey mama. All the world must obey mama.'

'That is true. Then, our demoiselle, reward me, if you will, by letting me hear the stave you were going to sing and I interrupted it.'

'What, you love music, sir?'

'I adore it.'

The little princess looked inquiringly at her mother, and received a smile of assent. She then took her lute and sang a romaunt of the day. Although but twelve years old, she was a well-taught and pains-taking musician. Her little claw swept the chords with courage and precision, and struck out the notes of the arpeggio clear and distinct, and bright like twinkling stars; but the main charm was her voice. It was not mighty, but it was round, clear, full, and ringing like a bell. She sang with a certain modest eloquence, though she knew none of the tricks of feeling. She was too young to be theatrical or even sentimental, so nothing was forced—all gushed. Her little mouth seemed the mouth of Nature. The ditty, too, was as pure as its utterance. As there were none of those false divisions—those whining slurs, which are now sold so dear by Italian songsters, though every jackal in India delivers them gratis to his customers all night, and sometimes gets shot for them, and always deserves it—so there were no cadences and fiorituri; the trite, turgid, and feeble expletives of song, the skim milk, with which mindless musicians and mindless writers quench fire, wash out colour, and drown melody and meaning dead.

While the pure and tender strain was flowing from

the pure young throat, Gerard's eyes filled with tears. The countess watched him with interest, for it was usual to applaud the princess loudly, but not with cheek and eye. So when the voice ceased, and the glasses left off ringing, she asked demurely, 'Was he satisfied?'

Gerard gave a little start; the spoken voice broke a charm, and brought him back to earth.

'Oh, madam!' he cried, 'surely it is thus that cherubs and seraphs sing and charm the saints in heaven.'

'I am somewhat of your opinion, my young friend,' said the countess, with emotion; and she bent a look of love and gentle pride upon her girl: a heavenly look, such as, they say, is given to the eye of the short-lived resting on the short-lived.

The countess resumed:

'My old friend requests me to be serviceable to you. It is the first favour she has done us the honour of asking us, and the request is sacred. You are in holy orders, sir?'

Gerard bowed.

'I fear you are not a priest, you look too young.'

'Oh no, madam! I am not even a sub-deacon. I am only a lector; but next month I shall be an exorcist; and before long an acolyth.'

'Well, Monsieur Gerard, with your accomplishments you can soon pass through the inferior orders. And let me beg you to do so. For the day after you have said your first mass, I shall have the pleasure of appointing you to a benefice.'

'Oh, madam!'

'And Marie, remember I make this promise in your name as well as my own.'

'Fear not, mama: I will not forget. But if he will take my advice, what he will be is Bishop of Liège.'

The Bishop of Liège is a beautiful bishop. What ! don't you remember him, mama, that day we were at Liège ? he was braver than grandpapa himself. He had on a crown—a high one, and it was cut in the middle, and it was full of oh ! such beautiful jewels : and his gown stiff with gold ; and his mantle, too ; and it had a broad border, all pictures : but, above all, his gloves ; you have no such gloves, mama. They were embroidered and covered with jewels, and scented with such lovely scent ; I smelt them all the time he was giving me his blessing on my head with them. Dear old man ! I dare say he will die soon—most old people do—and then, sir, you can be bishop, you know, and wear——’

‘ Gently, Marie, gently : bishoprics are for old gentlemen ; and this is a young gentleman.’

‘ Mama ! he is not so very young.’

‘ Not compared with you, Marie, eh ? ’

‘ He is a good bigness, dear mama ; and I am sure he is *good* enough for a bishop.’

‘ Alas, mademoiselle ! you are mistaken.’

‘ I don't know that, Monsieur Gerard ; but I am a little puzzled to know on what grounds mademoiselle there pronounced your character so boldly.’

‘ Alas, mama ! ’ said the princess, ‘ you have not looked at his face, then ; ’ and she raised her eyebrows at her mother's simplicity.

‘ I beg your pardon,’ said the countess, ‘ I have. Well, sir, if I cannot go quite so fast as my daughter, attribute it to my age, not to a want of interest in your welfare. A benefice will do to begin your career with ; and I must take care it is not too far from—what call you the place ? ’

‘ Tergou, madam.’

‘ A priest gives up much,’ continued the countess ; ‘ often, I fear, he learns too late how much : ’ and her

woman's eye rested a moment on Gerard with mild pity and half surprise at his resigning her sex, and all the heaven they can bestow, and the great parental joys : 'at least you shall be near your friends. Have you a mother ?'

'Yes, madam ; thanks be to God !'

'Good ! You shall have a church near Tergou. She will thank me. And now, sir, we must not detain you too long from those who have a better claim on your society than we have. Duchess, oblige me by bidding one of the pages conduct him to the hall of banquet ; the way is hard to find.'

Gerard bowed low to the countess and the princess, and backed towards the door.

'I hope it will be a nice benefice,' said the princess to him, with a pretty smile, as he was going out ; then, shaking her head with an air of solemn misgiving, 'but you had better have been Bishop of Liège.'

Gerard followed his new conductor, his heart warm with gratitude : but ere he reached the banquet-hall a chill came over him. The mind of one who has led a quiet, uneventful life, is not apt to take in contradictory feelings at the same moment and balance them, but rather to be overpowered by each in turn. While Gerard was with the countess, the excitement of so new a situation, the unlooked-for promise, the joy and pride it would cause at home, possessed him wholly : but now it was passion's turn to be heard again. What, give up Margaret, whose soft hand he still felt in his, and her deep eyes in his heart ? resign her and all the world of love and joy she had opened on him to-day ? The revulsion, when it did come, was so strong, that he hastily resolved to say nothing at home about the offered benefice. 'The countess is so good,' thought he, 'she has a hundred ways of aiding a young man's fortune : she will not compel

me to be a priest when she shall learn I love one of her sex : one would almost think she does know it, for she cast a strange look on me, and said, " A priest gives up much, too much." I dare say she will give me a place about the palace.' And with this hopeful reflection his mind was cased, and, being now at the entrance of the banqueting-hall, he thanked his conductor, and ran hastily with joyful eyes to Margaret. He came in sight of the table—she was gone. Peter was gone too. Nobody was at the table at all ; only a citizen in sober garments had just tumbled under it dead drunk, and several persons were raising him to carry him away. Gerard never guessed how important this solemn drunkard was to him : he was looking for ' Beauty ', and let ' the beast ' lie. He ran wildly round the hall, which was now comparatively empty. She was not there. He left the palace : outside he found a crowd gaping at two great fanlights just lighted over the gate. He asked them earnestly if they had seen an old man in a gown, and a lovely girl pass out. They laughed at the question. ' They were staring at these new lights that turn night into day. They didn't trouble their heads about old men and young wenches, everyday sights.' From another group he learned there was a mystery being played under canvas hard by, and all the world gone to see it. This revived his hopes, and he went and saw the mystery. In this representation divine personages, too sacred for me to name here, came clumsily down from heaven to talk sophistry with the cardinal virtues, the nine muses, and the seven deadly sins, all present in human shape, and not unlike one another. To enliven which weary stuff in rattled the prince of the power of the air, and an imp that kept molesting him and buffeting him with a bladder, at each thwack of which the crowd were in ecstasies. When the vices

had uttered good store of obscenity and the virtues twaddle, the celestials, including the nine muses, went gingerly back to heaven one by one ; for there was but one cloud ; and two artisans worked it up with its supernatural freight, and worked it down with a winch, in full sight of the audience. These disposed of, the bottomless pit opened and flamed in the centre of the stage : the carpenters and virtues shoved the vices in, and the virtues and Beelzebub and his tormentor danced merrily round the place of eternal torture to the fife and tabor.

This entertainment was writ by the Bishop of Ghent for the diffusion of religious sentiment by the aid of the senses, and was an average specimen of theatrical exhibitions so long as they were in the hands of the clergy. But, alas ! in course of time the laity conducted plays, and so the theatre, my reverend friends inform me, has become profane.

Margaret was nowhere in the crowd, and Gerard could not enjoy the performance : he actually went away in Act II, in the midst of a much-admired piece of dialogue, in which Justice outquibbled Satan. He walked through many streets, but could not find her he sought. At last, fairly worn out, he went to a hostelry and slept till daybreak. All that day, heavy and heartsick, he sought her, but could never fall in with her or her father, nor ever obtain the slightest clue. Then he felt she was false, or had changed her mind. He was irritated now, as well as sad. More good fortune fell on him : he almost hated it. At last on the third day, after he had once more been through every street, he said : ‘ She is not in the town, and I shall never see her again. I will go home.’ He started for Tergou with royal favour promised, with fifteen golden angels in his purse, a golden medal on his bosom, and a heart like a lump of lead.

CHAPTER VI

IT was near four o'clock in the afternoon. Gerard was in the shop. His eldest and youngest sons were abroad. Catherine and her little crippled daughter had long been anxious about Gerard, and now they were gone a little way down the road, to see if by good luck he might be visible in the distance ; and Giles was alone in the sitting-room, which I will sketch, furniture and dwarf included.

The Hollanders were always an original and leading people. At different epochs they invented printing (wooden type), oil-painting, liberty, banking, gardening, &c. ; above all, years before my tale, they invented cleanliness. So, while the English gentry, in velvet jerkins and chicken-toed shoes, trode floors of stale rushes, foul receptacle of bones, decomposing morsels, spittle, dogs' eggs, and all abominations, this hosier's sitting-room at Tergou was floored with Dutch tiles, so highly glazed and constantly washed, that you could eat off them. There was one large window ; the cross stonework in the centre of it was very massive, and stood in relief, looking like an actual cross to the inmates, and was eyed as such in their devotions. The panes were very small and lozenge-shaped, and soldered to one another with strips of lead : the like you may see to this day in some of our rural cottages. The chairs were rude and primitive, all but the arm-chair, whose back, at right angles with its seat, was so high that the sitter's head stopped two feet short of the top. This chair was of oak, and carved at the summit. There was a copper pail, that went in at the waist, holding holy water ; and a little hand-besom to sprinkle it far and wide ; and a long, narrow, but massive oak table, with

a dwarf sticking to the rim by his teeth, his eyes glaring, and his claws in the air like a pouncing vampire. Nature, it would seem, did not make Giles a dwarf out of malice prepense: she constructed a head and torso with her usual care, but just then her attention was distracted, and she left the rest to chance; the result was a human wedge, an inverted cone. He might with justice have taken her to task in the terms of Horace:

‘*amphora coepit Institui; currente rota cur urceus
exit?*’

His centre was anything but his centre of gravity. Bisected, upper Giles would have outweighed three lower Giles’s. But this very disproportion enabled him to do feats that would have baffled Milo. His brawny arms had no weight to draw after them; so he could go up a vertical pole like a squirrel, and hang for hours from a bough by one hand like a cherry by its stalk. If he could have made a vacuum with his hands, as the lizard is said to do with its feet, he would have gone along a ceiling. Now, this pocket athlete was insanely fond of gripping the dinner-table with both hands, and so swinging an hour at a time; and then—climax of delight!—he would seize it with his teeth, and, taking off his hands, hold on like grim death by his huge ivories.

But all our joys, however elevating, suffer interruption. Little Kate caught Sampsonet in this posture, and stood aghast. She was her mother’s daughter, and her heart beat with the furniture, not with the 12mo gymnast.

‘Oh, Giles! how can you? Mother would be vexed. It dents the table.’

‘Go and tell her, little tale-bearer,’ snarled Giles.
‘You are the one for making mischief.’

‘Am I?’ inquired Kate, calmly; ‘that is news to me.’

‘The biggest in Tergou,’ growled Giles, fastening on again.

At this Kate sat quietly down and cried. Her mother came in almost at that moment, and Giles hurled himself under the table, and there glared.

‘What is to do now?’ said the dame, sharply. Then turning her experienced eyes on Giles, and observing the position he had taken up, and a sheepish expression, she hinted at cuffing of ears.

‘Nay, mother,’ said the girl; ‘it was but a foolish word Giles spoke. I had not noticed it at another time; but I was tired and in care for Gerard, you know.’

‘Let no one be in care for me,’ said a faint voice at the door, and in tottered Gerard, pale, dusty, and worn out; and, amidst uplifted hands and cries of delight, curiosity, and anxiety mingled, dropped almost fainting into the nearest chair.

Beating Rotterdam, like a covert, for Margaret, and the long journey afterwards, had fairly knocked Gerard up. But elastic youth soon revived, and behold him the centre of an eager circle. First of all they must hear about the prizes. Then Gerard told them he had been admitted to see the competitors’ works all laid out in an enormous hall—before the judges pronounced: ‘Oh, mother! oh, Kate! when I saw the goldsmiths’ work, I had like to have fallen on the floor. I thought not all the goldsmiths on earth had so much gold, silver, jewels, and craft of design and facture. But, in sooth, all the arts are divine.’

Then, to please the females, he described to them the reliquaries, feretories, calices, crosiers, crosses, pyxes, monstrances, and other wonders ecclesiastical, and the goblets, hanaps, watches, clocks, chains, brooches, &c., so that their mouths watered.

‘ But, Kate, when I came to the illuminated work from Ghent and Bruges, my heart sank. Mine was dirt by the side of it. For the first minute I could almost have cried ; but I prayed for a better spirit, and presently I was able to enjoy them, and thank God for those lovely works, and for those skilful, patient craftsmen, that I own my masters. Well, the colored work was so beautiful I forgot all about the black and white. But, next day, when all the other prizes had been given, they came to the writing, and whose name think you was called first ? ’

‘ Yours,’ said Kate.

The others laughed her to scorn.

‘ You may laugh,’ said Gerard, ‘ but for all that Gerard Gerardzoon of Tergou was the name the herald shouted. I stood stupid ; they thrust me forward. Everything swam before my eyes. I don’t know how I found myself kneeling on a cushion at the feet of the duke. He said something to me, but I was so fluttered I could not answer him. So then he put his hand to his side and did not draw a glaive and cut off my dull head, but gave me a gold medal, and there it is.’ There was a yell and almost a scramble. ‘ And then he gave me fifteen great bright golden angels. I had seen one before, but I never handled one. Here they are.’

‘ Oh, Gerard ! oh, Gerard ! ’

‘ There is one for you, our eldest ; and one for you, Sybrandt, and for you, Little Mischief ; and two for you, Little Lily, because God has afflicted you ; and one for myself to buy colours and vellum ; and nine for her that nursed us all, and risked the two crowns upon poor Gerard’s hand.’

The gold drew out their several characters. Cornelis and Sybrandt clutched each his coin with one glare of greediness and another glare of envy at Kate, who

had got two pieces. Giles seized his and rolled it along the floor and gambolled after it. But Kate put down her crutches and sat down, and held out her little arms to Gerard with a heavenly gesture of love and tenderness, and the mother, fairly benumbed at first by the shower of gold that fell on her apron, now cried out, 'Leave kissing him, Kate, he is my son, not yours. Ah, Gerard, my child ! I have not loved you as you deserved.'

Then Gerard threw himself on his knees beside her, and she flung her arms round him and wept for joy and pride, upon his neck.

'Good lad ! good lad !' cried the hosier, with some emotion. 'I must go and tell the neighbours. Lend me the medal, Gerard, I'll show it my good friend, Peter Buyskens ; he is always regaling me with how his son Jorian won the tin mug a-shooting at the Butts.'

'Aye, do my man ; and show Peter Buyskens one of the angels. Tell him there are fourteen more, where that came from. Mind you bring it me back !'

'Stay a minute, father, there is better news behind,' said Gerard, flushing with joy at the joy he caused.

'Better ! Better than this ?'

Then Gerard told his interview with the countess, and the house rang with joy.

'Now, God bless the good lady, and bless the Dame Van Eyck ! a benefice, our son ! My cares are at an end. Gerard, my good friend and master, now we two can die happy whenever our time comes. This dear boy will take our place, and none of these loved ones will want a home or a friend.'

From that hour Gerard was looked upon as the stay of the family. He was a son apart, but in another sense. He was always in the right, and nothing too good for him. Cornelis and Sybrandt became more and more jealous of him, and longed for the day he

should go to his benefice : they would get rid of the favourite, and his reverence's purse would be open to them. With these views he co-operated. The wound love had given him throbbed duller and duller. His success- and the affection and admiration of his parents, made him think more highly of himself, and resent with more spirit Margaret's ingratitude and discourtesy. For all that, she had power to cool him towards the rest of her sex, and now for every reason he wished to be ordained priest as soon as he could pass the intermediate orders. He knew the Vulgate already better than most of the clergy, and he studied the rubric and the dogmas of the church with his friends the monks ; and, the first time the bishop came that way, he applied to be admitted 'exorcist', the third step in holy orders. The bishop questioned him, and ordained him at once. He had to kneel, and, after a short prayer, the bishop delivered to him a little MS. full of exorcisms, and said : 'Take this, Gerard, and have power to lay hands on the possessed, whether baptized or catechumens !' and he took it reverently, and went home invested by the church with power to cast out demons.

Returning home from the church, he was met by little Kate on her crutches.

'Oh, Gerard ! who, think you, has been at our house seeking you ?—the Burgomaster himself.'

Gerard started, and changed colour.

'Ghysbrecht Van Swieten ? What would he with me ?'

'Nay, Gerard, I know not. But he was urgent to see you. You are to go to his house on the instant.'

'Well, he is the Burgomaster : I must go : but it likes me not. Kate, I have seen him cast such a look on me as no friend casts. No matter ; such looks forewarn the wise. Besides, he knows——'

‘ Knows what, Gerard ? ’

‘ Nothing.’

‘ Nothing ? ’

‘ Kate, I’ll go.’

And he went to Ghysbrecht Van Swieten’s house.

CHAPTER VII

GHYSBRECHT VAN SWIETEN was an artful man. He opened on the novice with something quite wide of the mark he was really aiming at. ‘ The town records,’ said he, ‘ are crabbedly written, and the ink rusty with age.’ He offered Gerard the honour of transcribing them fair.

Gerard inquired what he was to be paid.

Ghysbrecht offered a sum that would have just purchased the pens, ink, and parchment.

‘ But, Burgomaster, my labour ? Here is a year’s work.’

‘ Your labour ! Call you marking parchment labour ? Little sweat goes to that, I trow.’

‘ ’Tis labour, and skilled labour to boot : and that is better paid in all crafts than rude labour, sweat or no sweat. Besides, there’s my time.’

‘ Your time ? Why what is time to you, at two-and-twenty ? ’ Then fixing his eyes keenly on Gerard, to mark the effect of his words, he said : ‘ Say, rather, you are idle grown. You are in love. Your body is with those chanting monks, but your heart is with Peter Brandt and his red-haired girl.’

‘ I know no Peter Brandt.’

This denial confirmed Ghysbrecht’s suspicion that the caster out of demons was playing a deep game.

‘ Ye lie ! ’ he shouted. ‘ Did I not find you at her elbow, on the road to Rotterdam ? ’



‘ Ah ! ’

‘ Ah. And you were seen at Sevenbergen but t’other day.’

‘ Was I ? ’

‘ Aye ; and at Peter’s house.’

‘ At Sevenbergen ? ’

‘ Aye, at Sevenbergen.’

Now, this was what in modern days is called a draw. It was a guess, put boldly forth as fact, to elicit by the young man’s answer whether he had been there lately or not.

The result of the artifice surprised the crafty one. Gerard started up in a strange state of nervous excitement.

‘ Burgomaster,’ said he, with trembling voice, ‘ I have not been at Sevenbergen this three years, and I know not the name of those you saw me with, nor where they dwelt ; but, as my time is precious, though you value it not, give you good day.’ And he darted out, with his eyes sparkling.

Ghysbrecht started up in huge ire ; but he sank into his chair again.

‘ He fears me not. He knows something, if not all.’

Then he called hastily to his trusty servant, and almost dragged him to a window.

‘ See you yon man ? ’ he cried. ‘ Haste ! Follow him ! But let him not see you. He is young, but old in craft. Keep him in sight all day. Let me know whither he goes, and what he does.’

It was night when the servant returned.

‘ Well ! well ! ’ cried Van Swieten, eagerly.

‘ Master, the young man went from you to Sevenbergen.’

Ghysbrecht groaned.

To the house of Peter the Magician.’

CHAPTER VIII

‘Look into your own heart and write!’ said Herr Cant; and earth’s cuckoos echoed the cry. Look into the Rhine where it is deepest, and the Thames where it is thickest, and paint the bottom. Lower a bucket into a well of self-deception, and what comes up must be immortal truth, mustn’t it? Now, in the first place no son of Adam ever reads his own heart at all, except by the habit acquired and the light gained from some years’ perusal of other hearts; and even then, with his acquired sagacity and reflected light, he can but spell and decipher his own heart, not read it fluently. Gerard was so young and green that he needed no philosopherling to lead him into shallow water. Half way to Sevenbergen he looked into his own heart, and asked it why he was going to Sevenbergen. His heart replied without a moment’s hesitation. We are going out of mere curiosity, to know why she jilted us, and to show her it has not broken our hearts, and that we are quite content with our honours and our benefice in prospectu, and don’t want her or any of her fickle sex.

He soon found out Peter Brandt’s cottage; and there sat a girl in the doorway, plying her needle, and a stalwart figure leaned on a long bow and talked to her. Gerard felt an unaccountable pang at the sight of him. However, the man turned out to be past fifty years of age, an old soldier, whom Gerard remembered to have seen shoot at the butts with admirable force and skill. Another minute and the youth stood before them. Margaret looked up and dropped her work, and uttered a faint cry, and was white and red by turns. But these signs of emotion were swiftly

dismissed, and she turned far more chill and indifferent than she would if she had not betrayed this agitation.

‘What ! is it you, Master Gerard ? What on earth brings you here, I wonder.’

‘I was passing by and saw you ; so I thought I would give you good day, and ask after your father.’

‘My father is well. He will be here anon.’

Then I may as well stay till he comes.’

‘As you will. Good Martin, step into the village and tell my father here is a friend of his.’

‘And not of yours ? ’

‘My father’s friends are mine.’

‘That is doubtful. It was not like a friend to promise to wait for me, and then make off the moment my back was turned. Cruel Margaret ! you little know how I searched the town for you—how for want of you nothing was pleasant to me.’

‘These are idle words ; if you had desired my father’s company, or mine, you would have come back. There I had a bed laid for you, sir, at my cousin’s, and he would have made much of you, and, who knows, I might have made much of you too. I was in the humour that day. You will not catch me in the same mind again, neither you nor any young man, I warrant me.’

‘Margaret, I came back the moment the countess let me go ; but you were not there.’

‘Nay, you did not, or you had seen Hans Cloterman at our table ; we left him to bring you on.’

‘I saw no one there, but only a drunken man that had just tumbled down.’

‘At our table ? How was he clad ? ’

‘Nay, I took little heed : in sad-coloured garb.’

At this Margaret’s face gradually lighted with a mixture of archness and happiness ; then assuming incredulity and severity, she put many shrewd ques-



tions, all of which Gerard answered most loyally. Finally, the clouds cleared, and they guessed how the misunderstanding had come about. Then came a revulsion of tenderness, all the more powerful that they had done each other wrong ; and then, more dangerous still, came mutual confessions. Neither had been happy since ; neither ever would have been happy but for this fortunate meeting.

And Gerard found a MS. Vulgate lying open on the table, and pounced upon it like a hawk. MSS. were his delight ; but before he could get to it two white hands quickly came flat upon the page, and a red face confronted him.

‘Nay, take away your hands, Margaret, that I may see where you are reading, and I will read there too at home ; so shall my soul meet yours in the sacred page. You will not ? Nay, then, I must kiss them away.’ And he kissed them so often, that for very shame they were fain to withdraw, and, lo ! the sacred book proved to be open at

‘An apple of gold in a network of silver.’

‘There, now,’ said she, ‘I had been hunting for it ever so long, and found it but even now—and to be caught !’ and with a touch of inconsistency she pointed it out to Gerard with her white finger.

‘Aye,’ said he, ‘but to-day it is all hidden in that great cap.’

‘It is a comely cap, I’m told by some.’

‘May be : but what it hides is beautiful.’

‘It is not : it is hideous.’

‘Well, it was beautiful at Rotterdam.’

‘Aye, everything was beautiful that day.’

And now Peter came in, and welcomed Gerard cordially, and would have him to stay supper. And Margaret disappeared ; and Gerard had a nice learned chat with Peter ; and Margaret reappeared with her

hair in her silver net, and shot a glance half arch, half coy, and she glided about them, and spread supper, and beamed bright with gaiety and happiness. And in the cool evening Gerard coaxed her out, and coaxed her on to the road to Tergou, and there they strolled up and down, hand in hand; and when he must go they pledged each other never to quarrel or misunderstand one another again; and they sealed the promise with a long loving kiss, and Gerard went home on wings.

From that day Gerard spent most of his evenings with Margaret, and the attachment deepened and deepened on both sides till the hours they spent together were the hours they lived; the rest they counted and underwent. And at the outset of this deep attachment all went smoothly; obstacles there were, but they seemed distant and small to the eyes of hope, youth, and love. The feelings and passions of so many persons, that this attachment would thwart, gave no warning smoke to show their volcanic nature and power. The course of true love ran smoothly, placidly, until it had drawn these two young hearts into its current for ever, and then——

CHAPTER IX

ONE bright morning unwonted velvet shone, unwonted feathers waved, and horses' hoofs glinted and rang through the streets of Tergou, and the windows and balconies were studded with wondering faces. The French Ambassador was riding through to sport in the neighbouring forest.

Besides his own suite he was attended by several

servants of the Duke of Burgundy, lent to do him honour and minister to his pleasure. The duke's tumbler rode before him with a grave, sedate majesty, that made his more noble companions seem light, frivolous persons. But ever and anon, when respect and awe neared the oppressive, he rolled off his horse so ignobly and funnily that even the ambassador was fain to burst out laughing. He also climbed up again by the tail in a way provocative of mirth, and so he played his part. Towards the tail of the pageant rode one that excited more attention still—the duke's leopard. A huntsman mounted on a Flemish horse of prodigious size and power carried a long box fastened to the rider's loins by straps curiously contrived, and on this box sat a huge leopard crouching. She was chained to the huntsman. The people admired her glossy hide and spots, and pressed near, and one or two were for feeling her, and pulling her tail; then the huntsman shouted in a terrible voice, 'Beware! At Antwerp one did but throw a handful of dust at her, and the duke made dust of him.'

'Gramercy!'

'I speak sooth. The good duke shut him up in prison, in a cell under ground, and the rats cleaned the flesh off his bones in a night. Served him right for molesting the poor thing.' There was a murmur of fear, and the Tergovians shrank from tickling the leopard of their sovereign.

But an incident followed that raised their spirits again. The duke's giant, a Hungarian seven feet four inches high, brought up the rear. This enormous creature had, like some other giants, a treble, fluty voice of little power. He was a vain fellow, and not conscious of this or any defect. Now it happened he caught sight of Giles sitting on the top of the balcony; so he stopped and began to make fun of him.

‘Hallo! brother!’ squeaked he, ‘I had nearly passed without seeing thee.’

‘You are plain enough to see,’ bellowed Giles, in his bass tones.

‘Come on my shoulder, brother,’ squeaked Titan, and held out a shoulder of mutton fist to help him down.

‘If I do I’ll cuff your ears,’ roared the dwarf.

The giant saw the homuncule was irascible, and played upon him, being encouraged thereto by the shouts of laughter. He did not see that the people were laughing not at his wit, but at the ridiculous incongruity of the two voices—the gigantic feeble fife and the petty, deep, loud drum, the mountain delivered of a squeak and the mole-hill belching thunder.

The singular duet came to as singular an end. Giles lost all patience and self-command, and being a creature devoid of fear, and in a rage to boot, he actually dropped upon the giant’s neck, seized his hair with one hand, and punched his head with the other. The giant’s first impulse was to laugh, but the weight and rapidity of the blows speedily corrected that inclination.

‘He! he! Ah! ha! hallo! oh! oh! Holy saints! here! help! or I must throttle the imp. I can’t! O Lord! I’ll split your skull against the——’ and he made a wild run backwards at the balcony. Giles saw his danger, seized the balcony in time with both hands, and whipped over it just as the giant’s head came against it with a stunning crack. The people roared with laughter and exultation at the address of their little champion. The indignant giant seized two of the laughers, knocked them together like dumb-bells, shook them and strewed them flat—(Catherine shrieked, and threw her apron over Giles)—

then strode wrathfully away after the party. This incident had consequences no one then present foresaw : it made Mr. Giles a companion of princes. Its immediate results were agreeable. The Tergovians turned proud of him, and after this listened with more affability to his prayers for parchment. For Giles drove a regular trade with his brother Gerard in this article. That is to say, he went about, and begged it gratis, and Gerard gave him coppers for it.

On the afternoon of the same day, Catherine and her daughter were chatting together about their favourite theme, Gerard, his goodness, his benefice, and the brightened prospects of the whole family.

Their good luck had come to them in the very shape they would have chosen ; besides the advantages of a benefice such as the Countess Charolois would not disdain to give, there was the feminine delight at having a priest, a holy man, in their own family. He will marry Cornelis, and Sybrandt : for they can marry (good housewives), now, if they will : ‘ Gerard will take care of you and Giles, when we are gone.’ ‘ Yes, mother, and we can confess to him instead of to a stranger,’ said Kate.

‘ Aye, girl ! and he can give the sacred oil to your father and me, and close our eyes, when our time comes.’

‘ Oh, mother ! not for many, many years, I do pray heaven. Pray don’t speak of that, it always makes me sad. I hope I shall go before you, mother dear. No ! let us be gay to-day. I am out of pain, mother—quite out of all pain ; it does seem so strange ; and I feel so bright and happy, that—mother, can you keep a secret ? ’

‘ Nobody better, child. Why, you know I can.’

‘ Then I will show you something so beautiful.

You never saw the like, I trow. Only Gerard must never know ; for I am sure he means to surprise us with it, he covers it up so, and sometimes he carries it away altogether.'

Kate took her crutches, and moved slowly away, leaving her mother in an exalted state of curiosity. She soon returned with something in a cloth, uncovered it, and there was a lovely picture of the Virgin, with all her insignia, and wearing her tiara over a wealth of beautiful hair, which flowed loose over her shoulders. Catherine, at first, was struck with awe.

'It is herself !' she cried ; 'it is the Queen of Heaven ! I never saw one like her to my mind before.'

'And her eyes, mother ! lifted to heaven, as if they belonged there, and not to a mortal creature. And her beautiful hair of burning gold.'

'And to think I have a son that can make the saints live again upon a piece of wood !'

'The reason is, he is a young saint himself, mother. He is too good for this world ; he is here to pourtray the blessed, and then to go away and be with them for ever.'

Ere they had half done admiring it, a strange voice was heard at the door. By one of the furtive instincts of their sex they hastily hid the picture in the cloth, though there was no need. And the next moment in came, casting his eyes furtively around, a man that had not entered the house this ten years—Ghysbrecht Van Swieten.

The two women were so taken by surprise, that they merely stared at him and at one another, and said, 'The Burgomaster !' in a tone so expressive, that Ghysbrecht felt compelled to answer it.

'Yes ! I own, the last time I came here was not

on a friendly errand. Men love their own interest—Gerard's and mine were contrary. Well, let this visit atone the last. To-day, I come on your business, and none of mine.' Catherine and her daughter exchanged a swift glance of contemptuous incredulity. They knew the man better than he thought. 'It is about your son Gerard.'

'Aye! aye! you want him to work for the town—for nothing. He told us.'

'I come on no such errand. It is to let you know he has fallen into bad hands.'

'Now Heaven and the saints forbid! Man, torture not a mother! Speak out, and quickly: speak ere you have time to coin falsehood: we know you.'

Ghysbrecht turned pale at this affront, and spite mingled with the other motives that brought him here.

'Thus it is, then,' said he, grinding his teeth, and speaking very fast. 'Your son Gerard is more like to be a father of a family than a priest: he is for ever with Margaret, Peter Brandt's red-haired girl, and loves her like a cow her calf.'

Mother and daughter both burst out laughing. Ghysbrecht stared at them.

'What, you knew it?'

'Carry this tale to those who know not my son Gerard. Women are nought to him.'

'Other women, mayhap. But this one is the apple of his eye to him, or will be, if you part them not, and soon. Come, dame, don't make me waste time and friendly counsel: my servant has seen them together a score times, handed, and reading babies in one another's eyes like—you know, dame—you have been young too.'

'Kate, I am ill at ease. Yes, I have been young, and know how blind and foolish the young are. My

heart ! He has turned me sick in a moment. Oh, Kate, if it should be true !’

‘No, no !’ cried Kate, eagerly. ‘Gerard might love a young woman : all young men do : I can’t think what they see in them to love so : but if he did he would let us know : he would not deceive us. You wicked man ; you will kill my mother. No, dear mother, don’t look so ! Gerard is too good to love a creature of earth. His love is for our lady and the saints. Ah ! I will show you the pict—there : if his heart was earthly could he paint the Queen of Heaven like that—look ! look !’ and she held the picture out triumphantly, and more radiant and beautiful in this moment of enthusiasm than ever dead picture was or will be, overpowered the Burgomaster with her eloquence and her feminine proof of Gerard’s purity. His eyes and mouth opened, and remained open : in which state they kept turning, face and all, as if on a pivot, from the picture to the women, and from the women to the picture.

‘Why, it is herself !’ he gasped.

‘Isn’t it ?’ cried Kate, and her hostility was softened. ‘You admire it ? I forgive you for frightening us.’

‘Am I in a mad-house ?’ said Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, thoroughly puzzled. ‘You show me a picture of the girl ; and you say he painted it ; and that is a proof he cannot love her. Why they all paint their sweethearts, painters do.’

‘A picture of the girl ?’ exclaimed Kate, shocked. ‘Fie ! this is not a girl ; this is the Virgin Mary.’

‘No ; no, it is Margaret Brandt.’

‘Oh blind ! It is the Queen of Heaven.’

‘No ; only of Sevenbergen-village.’

‘Profane man ! behold her crown !’

‘Silly child ! look at her red hair !’

‘Would the Virgin be seen in red hair? She who had the pick of all the colours ten thousand years before the world began?’

At this moment an anxious face was insinuated round the edge of the open door: it was their neighbour Peter Buysken.

‘What is to do?’ said he, in a cautious whisper, ‘We can hear you all across the street. What on earth is to do?’

‘O, neighbour! What is to do? Why, here is the Burgomaster blackening my Gerard.’

‘Stop!’ cried Van Swieten. ‘Peter Buysken is come in the nick of time. He knows father and daughter both. They cured him of the colic. Here, Peter, who is that? Now, be silent, women, for one moment, if you can. Who is that?’

Peter gave a start. ‘Well, to be sure!’ was all his reply.

‘Who is it?’ repeated Ghysbrecht, impetuously.

Peter Buysken smiled. ‘Why you know as well as I do; but what have they put a crown on her for. I never saw her in a crown, for my part.’

‘Man alive! Can’t you open your great jaws, and just speak a wench’s name to oblige three people?’

‘I’d do a great deal more to oblige one of you than that, Burgomaster. If it isn’t as natural as life!’

‘Curse the man! he won’t, he won’t—curse him!’

‘Why, what have I done, now?’

‘Oh, sir!’ said little Kate, ‘for pity’s sake tell us; are these the features of one Margaret Brandt?’

‘A mirror is not truer, my little maid.’

‘But is it she, sir, for very certain?’

‘Why, don’t I tell you it is.’

‘Now, why couldn’t you say so at once,’ snarled Ghysbrecht.

‘I did say so, as plain as I could speak,’ snapped

Peter ; and they growled over this small bone of contention so zealously, that they did not see Catherine and her daughter had thrown their aprons over their heads, and were rocking to and fro in deep distress. The next moment, Gerard senior came in, and stood aghast. Catherine, though her face was covered, knew his footstep directly.

‘That is my poor man,’ she sobbed. ‘Tell him, good Peter Buysken, for I have not the courage to.’

Gerard turned pale. The presence of the Burgomaster in his house, after so many years of coolness, coupled with his wife’s and daughter’s distress, made him fear some heavy misfortune.

‘Richart ! Jacob !’ he gasped.

‘No ! no !’ said the Burgomaster ; ‘it is nearer home, and nobody is dead or dying, old friend.’

‘God bless you, Burgomaster ! Ah ! something is gone off my breast that was like to choke me. Now, what is the matter ?’

Ghysbrecht then told him all that he told the women, and showed the picture in evidence.

‘Is that all ?’ said Gerard. ‘What are ye roaring and bellowing for ? It is vexing, it is angering, but it is not like death, nor even sickness. Boys will be boys. He will outgrow that disease : ’tis but skin deep.’

But when Ghysbrecht told him that Margaret was a girl of good character ; that it was not to be supposed she would be so intimate if marriage had not been spoken of between them, Gerard’s brow darkened.

‘Marriage ? that shall never be,’ said he, sternly. ‘I’ll stay that, aye, by force if need be, as I would his hand lifted to cut his throat. I’d do what old John Koestein did t’other day.’

‘And what is that, in Heaven’s name ?’ asked the mother, suddenly removing her apron.

It was the Burgomaster who replied :

‘ He made me shut young Albert Koestein up in the prison of the Stadthouse till he knocked under : it was not long. Forty-eight hours, all alone, on bread and water, cooled his hot stomach. “ Tell my father I am his humble servant,” says he, “ and let me into the sun once more—the sun is worth all the wenches in the world.” ’

‘ Oh the cruelty of men ! ’ sighed Catherine.

‘ As to that, the Burgomaster has no choice : it is the law. And if a father says, “ Burgomaster, lock up my son,” he must do it. A fine thing it would be if a father might not lock up his own son.’

‘ Well, well ! it won’t come to that with me and my son. He never disobeyed me in his life : he never shall. Where is he ? It is past supper-time. Where is he, Kate ? ’

‘ Alas, I know not, father.’

‘ I know,’ said Ghysbrecht ; ‘ he is at Sevenbergen. My servant met him on the road.’

Supper passed in gloomy silence. Evening descended—no Gerard : eight o’clock came—no Gerard. Then the father sent all to bed except Catherine.

‘ You and I will walk abroad, wife, and talk over this new care.’

‘ Abroad, Gerard, at this time ! Whither ? ’

‘ Why, on the road to Sevenbergen.’

‘ Oh no, no hasty words, father ! Poor Gerard ! he never vexed you before.’

‘ Fear me not. But it must end ; and I am not one that trusts to-morrow with to-day’s work.’

The old couple walked hand in hand ; for, strange as it may appear to some of my readers, the use of the elbow to couples walking was never discovered

in Europe till centuries after this. They walked a long time in silence. The night was clear and balmy. Such nights, calm and silent, recall the past from the dead.

‘It is a many years since we walked so late, my man,’ said Catherine, softly.

‘Aye, sweetheart, more than we shall see again. (Is he never coming, I wonder ?)’

‘Not since our courting days, Gerard.’

‘No. Aye, you were a buxom lass then.’

‘And you were a comely lad, as ever a girl’s eye stole a look at. I do suppose Gerard is with her now, as you used to be with me. Nature is strong, and the same in all our generations.’

‘Nay, I hope he has left her by now, confound her, or we shall be here all night.’

‘Gerard!’

‘Well?’

‘I have been happy with you, sweetheart, for all our rubs—much happier, I trow, than if I had—been—a—a—nun. You won’t speak harshly to the poor child? One can be firm without being harsh.’

‘Surely.’

‘Have you been happy with me, my poor Gerard?’

‘Why, you know I have. Friends I have known, but none like you. Buss me, wife!’

‘A heart to share joy and grief with is a great comfort to man or woman. Isn’t it?’

‘It is so, my lass.

“*It doth joy double,
And halveth trouble,*”

runs the bye-word. Ah! here comes the young fool.’

Catherine trembled and held her husband’s hand tight. The moon was bright, but they were in the

shadow of some trees, and their son did not see them. He came singing in the moonlight, and his face shining.

CHAPTER X

WHILE the Burgomaster was exposing Gerard at Tergou, Margaret had a trouble of her own at Sevenbergen. It was a housewife's distress, but deeper than we can well conceive. She came to Martin Wittenhaagen, the old soldier, with tears in her eyes.

'Oh, Martin, there's nothing in the house, and Gerard is coming, and he is so thoughtless. He forgets to sup at home. When he puts down work then he runs to me straight, poor soul: and often he comes here quite faint. And to think I should have nothing to set before my servant that loves me so dear.'

Martin scratched his head.

'What can I do?'

'It is Thursday; it is your day to shoot,—sooth to say, I counted on you to-day.'

'Nay,' said the soldier, 'I may not shoot when the duke or his friends are at the chace: read else. I am no scholar.' And he took out of his pouch a parchment with a grand seal. It purported to be a stipend and a licence given by Philip Duke of Burgundy to M. W. one of his archers, in return for services in the wars, and for a wound received at the duke's side. The stipend was four merks yearly to be paid by the duke's almoner, and the licence was to shoot three arrows once a week, viz., on Thursday, and no other day, in any of the duke's forests in Holland, at any game but a seven year old buck or a doe carrying fawn, proviso that the duke should

not be hunting on that day, or any of his friends. In this case Martin was not to go and disturb the woods on peril of his salary and head, &c.

Margaret sighed and was silent.

‘Come, cheer up, mistress,’ said he, ‘for your sake I’ll peril my carcass; I have done that for many a one that was not worth your forefinger. It is no such mighty risk either. I’ll but step into the skirts of the forest, here. It is odds but they drive a hare or a fawn within reach of my arrow.’

‘Martin, if I let you go you must promise me not to go far, and not to be seen; far better Gerard went supperless than ill should come to you, faithful Martin.’

The required promise given, Martin took his bow and three arrows, and stole cautiously into the wood: it was scarce a furlong distant. The horns were heard faintly in the distance, and all the game was afoot. Come, thought Martin, I shall soon fill the pot, and no one be the wiser. He took his stand behind a thick oak that commanded a view of an open glade, and strung his bow—a truly formidable weapon. It was of English yew, six feet two inches high, and thick in proportion: and Martin, broad chested, with arms all iron and cord, and used to the bow from infancy, could draw a three-foot arrow to the head, and when it flew, the eye could scarce follow it, and the bow-string twanged as musical as a harp. This bow had laid many a stout soldier low in the wars of the Hoecks and Cabbel-jaws. In those days a battlefield was not a cloud of smoke; the combatants were few but the deaths many; for they saw what they were about, and fewer bloodless arrows flew than bloodless bullets now. This tremendous weapon Martin now levelled at a hare. She came cantering, then sat sprightly, and her ears made a capital V.

The arrow flew, the string twanged : but Martin had been in a hurry to pot her, and lost her by an inch : the arrow seemed to strike her, but it struck the ground close to her, and passed under her belly like a flash, and hissed along the short grass and disappeared. She jumped three feet perpendicular, and away at the top of her speed. ‘Bungler!’ said Martin. A sure proof he was not an habitual bungler, or he would have blamed the hare. He had scarcely fitted another arrow to his string when a wood-pigeon settled on the very tree he stood under. Aha! thought he, you are small, but dainty. This time he took more pains; drew his arrow carefully, loosed it smoothly, and saw it, to all appearance, go clean through the bird, carrying feathers skyward like dust. Instead of falling at his feet, the bird, whose breast was torn, not fairly pierced, fluttered feebly away, and, by a great effort, rose above the trees, flew some fifty yards, and fell dead at last; but where he could not see for the thick foliage.

‘Luck is against me,’ said he, despondently. But he fitted another arrow, and eyed the glade keenly. Presently he heard a bustle behind him, and turned round just in time to see a noble buck cross the open, but too late to shoot at him. He dashed his bow down with an imprecation. At that moment a long spotted animal glided swiftly across after the deer; its belly seemed to touch the ground as it went. Martin took up his bow hastily, he recognized the duke’s leopard. ‘The hunters will not be far from her,’ said he, ‘and I must not be seen.’

He plunged into the wood, following the buck and leopard, for that was his way home. He had not gone far when he heard an unusual sound ahead of him—leaves rustling violently, and the ground trampled. An experienced huntsman, he suspected

the cause, and hurried in the direction. He found the leopard on the buck's back, tearing him with teeth and claw, and the buck running in a circle and bounding convulsively, with the blood pouring down his hide. Then Martin formed a desperate resolution to have the venison for Margaret. He drew his arrow to the head, and buried it in the deer, who, spite of the creature on his back, bounded high into the air, and fell dead. The leopard went on tearing him as if nothing had happened.

Martin hoped that the creature would gorge itself with blood, and then let him take the venison. He waited some minutes, then walked resolutely up, and laid his hand on the buck's leg. The leopard gave a frightful growl, and left off sucking blood. She saw Martin's game, and was sulky and on her guard. What was to be done? Martin had heard that wild creatures cannot stand the human eye. Accordingly he stood erect and fixed his on the leopard; the leopard returned a savage glance, and never took her eye off Martin. Then Martin, continuing to look the beast down, soon obtained an actual instead of a conventional result. The leopard flew at his head with a frightful yell, flaming eyes, and jaws and claws distended. He had but just time to catch her by the throat before her teeth could crush his face; one of her claws seized his shoulder and rent it, the other, aimed at his cheek, would have been more deadly still, but Martin was old-fashioned, and wore no hat but a scapulary of the same stuff as his jerkin, and this scapulary he had brought over his head like a hood; the brute's claw caught in the loose leather. Martin kept her teeth off his face with some difficulty, and griped her throat fiercely, and she kept rending his shoulder. It was like blunt reaping-hooks grinding and tearing. The pain was fearful: but, instead of

cowering the old soldier, it put his blood up, and he gnashed his teeth with rage almost as fierce as hers, and squeezed her neck with iron force. The two pair of eyes blazed at one another—and now the man's were almost as furious as the brute's. She found he was throttling her, and made a wild attempt to free herself, in which she dragged his cowl all over his face and blinded him, and tore her claw out of his shoulder, flesh and all : but still he throttled her with hand and arm of iron. Presently her long tail, that was high in the air, went down, and her body lost its elasticity, and he held a choked and powerless thing : he griped it still till all motion ceased, then dashed it to the earth ; then, panting, removed his cowl : the leopard lay still at his feet with tongue protruding and bloody paw ; and for the first time terror fell on Martin. 'I am a dead man : I have slain the duke's leopard.' He hastily seized a few handfuls of leaves and threw them over her ; then shouldered the buck and staggered away, leaving a trail of blood all the way—his own and the buck's. He burst into Peter's house a horrible figure, bleeding and blood-stained, and flung the deer's carcass down.

'There, no questions,' said he, 'but broil me a steak of it ; for I am faint.'

Margaret did not see he was wounded : she thought the blood was all from the deer.

She busied herself at the fire, and the stout soldier stanchd and bound his own wound apart, and soon he and Gerard and Margaret were supping royally on broiled venison.

They were very merry ; and Gerard, with wonderful thoughtfulness, had brought a flask of Scheidam, and under its influence Martin revived, and told them how the venison was got, and thence to the feats of his youth.

Their mirth was suddenly interrupted. Margaret's eye became fixed and fascinated, and her cheek pale with fear. She gasped, and could not speak, but pointed to the window with trembling finger. Their eyes followed hers, and there in the twilight crouched a dark form with eyes like glow-worms.

It was the leopard !

While they stood petrified, fascinated by the eyes of green fire, there sounded in the wood a single deep bay. It was the bay of a bloodhound. Martin trembled at it.

'They have lost her, and laid muzzled bloodhounds on her scent. They will find her here, and the venison. Good-bye, friends, Martin Wittenhaagen ends here.'

Gerard seized his bow, and put it into the soldier's hands.

'Be a man,' he cried, 'shoot her, and fling her into the wood ere they come up. Who will know ?'

More voices of hounds broke out, and nearer.

'Curse her !' cried Martin. 'I spared her once ; now she must die, or I, or both more likely ;' and he reared his bow, and drew his arrow to the head.

'No ! no !' cried Margaret, and seized the arrow : it broke in half : the pieces fell on each side the bow. The air at the same time filled with the tongues of the hounds : they were hot upon the scent.

'What have you done, wench. You have put the halter round my throat.'

'No !' cried Margaret. 'I have saved you : stand back from the window ! both. Your knife ! quick !' She seized his long pointed knife, almost tore it out of his girdle, and darted from the room. The house was now surrounded with baying dogs and shouting men.

The glow-worm eyes moved not.

CHAPTER XI

MARGARET cut off a huge piece of venison, and ran to the window, and threw it to the green eyes of fire. They darted on it with a savage snarl : and there was a sound of rending and crunching : at this moment, the hound uttered a bay so near and loud it rang through the house ; and the three at the window shrank together. Then the leopard feared for her supper, and glided swiftly and stealthily away with it towards the woods, and the very next moment horses and men and dogs came helter skelter past the window, and followed her full cry. Martin and his companions breathed again : the leopard was swift, and would not be caught within a league of their house.

To table once more, and Gerard drank to woman's wit : ' 'Tis stronger than man's force,' said he.

' Aye,' said Margaret, ' when those she loves are in danger ; not else.'

To-night Gerard stayed with her longer than usual, and went home prouder than ever of her, and happy as a prince. Some little distance from home, under the shadow of some trees, he encountered two figures : they almost barred his way.

It was his father and mother.

A cold chill fell on him.

He stopped and looked at them : they stood grim and silent. He stammered out some words of inquiry :

' What brought them out so late ? '

' Why ask ? ' said his father ; ' you can guess why we are here.'

' O, Gerard ! ' said his mother, with a voice full of reproach and yet of affection.



Gerard's heart quaked : he was silent.

Then his father pitied his confusion, and said to him :

'Nay, you need not to hang your head. You are not the first young fool that has been caught by a red cheek, and a pair of blue eyes.'

'No, no !' put in Catherine : 'it was witchcraft. Peter the Magician is well known for that.'

'Come, Sir Priest,' resumed his father. 'You know you must not meddle with women-folk. But give us your promise to go no more to Sevenbergen, and here all ends : we won't be hard on you for one fault.'

'I can't promise that, father.'

'Not promise it, you young hypocrite.'

'Nay, father, call me not so : I lacked courage to tell you what I knew would vex you ; and right grateful am I to that good friend, whoever he be, that has let you know. 'Tis a load off my mind. Yes, father, I love Margaret : and call me not a priest, for a priest I will never be. I will die sooner.'

'That we shall see, young man. Come, gainsay me no more ; you will learn what 'tis to offend a father.'

Gerard held his peace : and the three walked home in gloomy silence, broken only by a deep sigh or two from Catherine.

From that hour the little house of Tergou was no longer the abode of peace. Gerard was taken to task next day before the whole family ; and every voice was loud against him, except little Kate's, and the dwarf's, who was apt to take his cue from her without knowing why. As for Cornelis and Sybrandt, they were bitterer than their father. Gerard was dismayed at finding so many enemies, and looked wistfully into his little sister's face : her eyes were brimming at the harsh words showered on one who but yesterday

was the universal pet. But she gave him no encouragement : she turned her head away from him, and said :

‘ Dear, dear Gerard, pray to Heaven to cure you of this folly ! ’

‘ What, are you against me, too ! ’ said Gerard, sadly, and he rose with a deep sigh, and left the house ; and went to Sevenbergen.

The beginning of a quarrel, where the parties are bound by affection though opposed in interest and sentiment, is comparatively innocent ; both are in the right at first starting, and then it is that a calm, judicious friend, capable of seeing both sides, is a gift from Heaven. For the longer the dissension endures, the wider and deeper it grows by the fallibility and irascibility of human nature : these are not confined to either side, and finally the invariable end is reached — both in the wrong.

The combatants were unequally matched. Gerard Senior was angry, Cornelis and Sybrandt spiteful ; but Gerard, having a larger and more cultivated mind, saw both sides where they saw but one, and had fits of irresolution, and was not wrath, but unhappy. He was lonely, too, in this struggle. He could open his heart to no one. Margaret was a high spirited girl : he dared not tell her what he had to endure at home ; she was capable of siding with his relations by resigning him, though at the cost of her own happiness. Margaret Van Eyck had been a great comfort to him on another occasion ; but now he dared not make her his confidante. Her own history was well known. In early life she had many offers of marriage ; but refused them all for the sake of that art to which a wife’s and mother’s duties are so fatal : thus she remained single and painted with her brothers. How could he tell her that he declined the benefice she had got him, and declined it for the sake of that

which at his age she had despised and sacrificed so lightly.

Gerard at this period bade fair to succumb. But the other side had a horrible ally in Catherine Senior. This good-hearted but uneducated woman could not, like her daughter, act quietly and firmly : still less could she act upon a plan. She irritated Gerard at times, and so helped him, for anger is a great sustainer of the courage : at others she turned round in a moment and made onslaughts on her own forces. To take a single instance out of many : one day that they were all at home, Catherine and all, Cornelis said : ‘ Our Gerard wed Margaret Brandt ! Why it is hunger marrying thirst.’

‘ And what will it be when you marry ? ’ cried Catherine. ‘ Gerard can paint, Gerard can write, but what can you do to keep a woman, ye lazy loon ? Nought but wait for your father’s shoes. Oh, we can see why you and Sybrandt would not have the poor boy to marry. You are afraid he will come to us for a share of our substance. And suppose he does, and suppose we give it him, it isn’t yours to say nay, and mayhap never will be.’

On these occasions Gerard smiled slyly, and picked up heart : and temporary confusion fell on Catherine’s unfortunate allies. But at last, after more than six months of irritation, came the climax. The father told the son before the whole family he had ordered the Burgomaster to imprison him in the Stadthouse rather than let him marry Margaret. Gerard turned pale with anger at this, but by a great effort held his peace. His father went on to say, ‘ And a priest you shall be before the year is out, nilly willy.’

‘ Is it so ? ’ cried Gerard. ‘ Then hear me all. By God and St. Bavon I swear I will never be a priest while Margaret lives. Since force is to decide it, and

not love and duty, try force, father ; but force shall not serve you, for the day I see the Burgomaster come for me, I leave Tergou for ever, and Holland too, and my father's house, where it seems I have been valued all these years, not for myself, but for what is to be got out of me.'

And he flung out of the room white with anger and desperation.

'There !' cried Catherine, 'that comes of driving young folk too hard. But men are crueller than tigers, even to their own flesh and blood. Now, Heaven forbid he should ever leave us, married or single.'

As Gerard came out of the house, his cheeks pale and his heart panting, he met Richt Heynes : she had a message for him : Margaret Van Eyck desired to see him. He found the old lady seated grim as a judge. She wasted no time in preliminaries, but inquired coldly why he had not visited her of late : before he could answer, she said in a sarcastic tone, 'I thought we had been friends, young sir.'

At this Gerard looked the picture of doubt and consternation.

'It is because you never told her you were in love,' said Richt Heynes, pitying his confusion.

'Silence, wench ! Why should he tell us his affairs ? We are not his friends : we have not deserved his confidence.'

'Alas ! my second mother,' said Gerard, 'I did not dare to tell you my folly.'

'What folly ? Is it folly to love ?'

'I am told so every day of my life.'

'You need not have been afraid to tell my mistress ; she is always kind to true lovers.'

'Madam—Richt,—I was afraid because I was told——'

‘ Well ? you were told—— ’

‘ That in your youth you scorned love, preferring art.’

‘ I did, boy ; and what is the end of it ? Behold me here a barren stock, while the women of my youth have a troupe of children at their side, and grandchildren at their knee. I gave up the sweet joys of wifehood and motherhood for what ? for my dear brothers ; they have gone and left me long ago ;—for my art ; it has left me too. I have the knowledge still, but what avails that when the hand trembles. No, Gerard : I look on you as my son. You are good, you are handsome, you are a painter, though not like some I have known. I will never let you throw your youth away as I did mine : you shall marry this Margaret. I have inquired, and she is a good daughter. Right here is a gossip. She has told me all about it. But that need not hinder *you* to tell me.’

Poor Gerard was overjoyed to be permitted to tell his love and his unhappiness, and above all to praise Margaret aloud, and to one who could understand what he loved in her.

Soon there were two pair of wet eyes over his story ; and when the poor boy saw that, there were three.

Women are justly famous for courage. Theirs is not exactly the same quality as manly courage ; that would never do, hang it all ; we should have to give up trampling on them. No ; it is a vicarious courage. They never take part in a bull-fight by any chance ; but it is remarked that they sit at one unshaken by those tremors and apprehensions for the combatants to which the male spectator—feeble-minded wretch !—is subject. Nothing can exceed the resolution with which they have been known to send forth men to battle : as some witty dog says, ‘ *Les femmes sont très braves avec le peau d’autrui.*’

By this trait Gerard now profited. Margaret and Richt were agreed that a man should always take the bull by the horns. Gerard's only course was to marry Margaret Brandt off-hand; the old people would come to after a while, the deed once done. Whereas, the longer this misunderstanding continued on its present footing, the worse for all parties, especially for Gerard.

'See how pale and thin they have made him amongst them.'

'Indeed you are, Master Gerard,' said Richt. 'It makes a body sad to see a young man so wasted and worn. Mistress, when I met him in the street to-day, I had like to have burst out crying—he was so changed.'

'And I'll be bound the others keep their colour; eh Richt? such as it is.'

'Oh, I see no odds in them.'

'Of course not. We painters are no match for boors. We are glass, they are stone. We can't stand the worry, worry, worry of little minds; and it is not for the good of mankind we should be exposed to it. It is hard enough, God knows, to design and paint a masterpiece, without having gnats and flies stinging us to death into the bargain.'

Exasperated as Gerard was by his father's threat of violence, he listened to these friendly voices telling him his most prudent course was rebellion. But though he listened he was not convinced.

'I do not fear my father's violence,' he said, 'but I do fear his anger. When it came to the point he would not imprison me. I would marry Margaret to-morrow if that was my only fear. No; he would disown me. I should take Margaret from her father, and give her a poor husband, who would never thrive, weighed down by his parent's curse. Oh, madam! I

sometimes think if I could but marry her secretly, and then take her away to some country where my craft is better paid than in this ; and after a year or two, when the storm had blown over, you know, could come back with money in my purse, and say, " My dear parents, we do not seek your substance, we but ask you to love us once more as you used, and as we have never ceased to love you "—but, alas ! I shall be told these are the dreams of an inexperienced young man.'

The old lady's eyes sparkled.

' It is no dream, but a piece of wonderful common sense in a boy ; it remains to be seen whether you have spirit to carry out your own thought. There is a country, Gerard, where certain fortune awaits you at this moment. Here the arts freeze, but there they flourish, as they never yet flourished in any age or land.'

' It is Italy ! ' cried Gerard. ' It is Italy ! '

' Yes, Italy ! where painters are honoured like princes, and scribes are paid three hundred crowns for copying a single manuscript. Know you not that his Holiness the Pope has written to every land for skilful scribes to copy the hundreds of precious manuscripts that are pouring into that favoured land from Constantinople, whence learning and learned men are driven by the barbarian Turks.'

' Nay, I know not that ; but it has been the dream and hope of my life to visit Italy, the queen of all the arts. Oh, madam ! but the journey, and we are all so poor.'

' Find you the heart to go, I'll find the means. I know where to lay my hand on ten golden angels to take you to Rome ; and the girl will go with you if she loves you as she ought.'

They sat till midnight over this theme. And, after

that day, Gerard recovered his spirits, and seemed to carry some secret talisman against all the gibes and the harsh words that flew about his ears at home.

Besides the money she procured him for the journey, Margaret Van Eyck gave him money's worth. Said she, 'I will tell you secrets that I learned from masters that are gone from me, and have left no fellow behind. Even the Italians know not everything ; and what I tell you now in Tergou you may sell dear in Florence. Note my brother John's pictures : time, which fades all other paintings, leaves his colours bright as the day they left the easel. The reason is, he did nothing blindly, nothing in a hurry. He trusted to no hireling to grind his colours ; he did it himself, or saw it done. His panel was prepared, and prepared again—I will show you how—a year before he laid his colour on. Most of them are quite content to have their work sucked up and lost sooner than not be in a hurry—bad painters are always in a hurry. Above all, Gerard, I warn you never boil your oil ; boiling it melts that vegetable dross into its very heart, which it is our business to clear away ; for impure oil is death to colour. No ; take your oil and pour it into a bottle with water. In a day or two, the water will turn muddy : that is muck from the oil. Pour the dirty water carefully away, and add fresh. When that is poured away, you will fancy the oil is clear. You are mistaken. Richt, fetch me that ! Richt brought a glass trough with a glass lid fitting tight. 'When your oil has been washed in bottle, put it into this trough with water, and put the trough in the sun all day. You will soon see the water turbid again. But mark, you must not carry this game too far, or the sun will turn your oil to varnish. When it is as clear as crystal, and not too drying, drain carefully, and cork it up tight.

Grind your own prime colours, and lay them on with this oil, and they shall live. Hubert would put sand or salt in the water to clear the oil quicker. But John used to say, "Water will do it best, if you but give water time." Jan Van Eyck was never in a hurry, and that is why the world will not forget *him* in a hurry.'

This and several other receipts—*quae nunc perscribere longum est*—Margaret gave him with sparkling eyes, and Gerard received them like a legacy from Heaven, so interesting are some things that read uninteresting. Thus provided with money and knowledge, Gerard decided to marry and fly with his wife to Italy. Nothing remained now but to inform Margaret Brandt of his resolution, and to publish the banns as quietly as possible. He went to Sevenbergen earlier than usual on both these errands. He began with Margaret; told her of the Dame Van Eyck's goodness, and the resolution he had come to at last, and invited her co-operation.

She refused it plump.

CHAPTER XII

'No, Gerard; you and I have never spoken of your family, but when you come to marriage——' She stopped, then began again. 'I do think your father has no objection to me more than to another. He told Peter Buysken as much, and Peter told me. But so long as he is so bent on your being a priest (you ought to have told me this instead of I you), I could not marry you, Gerard, dearly as I love you.'

Gerard strove in vain to shake this resolution. He found it very easy to make her cry, but impossible to make her yield. Then Gerard was impatient and unjust.

‘Very well!’ he cried; ‘then you are on their side, and you will drive me to be a priest, for this must end one way or another. My parents hate me in earnest, but my lover only loves me in jest!’

And with this wild, bitter speech, he flung away home again, and left Margaret weeping.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN a man misbehaves, the effect is curious on a girl who loves him sincerely. It makes her pity him. This, to some of us males, seems anything but logical. The fault is in our own eye, the logic is too swift for us. The girl argues thus: ‘How unhappy, how vexed, poor . . . must be; *him* to misbehave!’

Margaret was full of this sweet womanly pity, when, to her great surprise, scarce an hour and a half after he left her, Gerard came running back to her with the fragments of a picture in his hand, and panting with anger and grief.

‘There, Margaret! see! see! the wretches! Look at their spite! They have cut your portrait to pieces.

Margaret looked. And, sure enough, some malicious hand had cut her portrait into five pieces. She was a good girl, but she was not ice; she turned red to her very forehead.

‘Who did it?’

‘Nay, I know not. I dared not ask; for I should hate the hand that did it, aye, till my dying day. My poor Margaret! The beasts! the ruffians! Six months’ work cut out of my life, and nothing to show for it now. See, they have hacked through your very face—the sweet face that every one loves who knows it. O, heartless, merciless vipers!’

‘Never mind, Gerard,’ said Margaret, panting.

‘ Since this is how they treat you for my sake—you rob him of my portrait, do you ! Well, then I give him the original.’

‘ O, Margaret ! ’

‘ Yes, Gerard ; since they are so cruel, I will be the kinder : forgive me for refusing you. I will be your wife—to-morrow, if it is your pleasure.’

CHAPTER XIV

THE banns of marriage had to be read three times, as with us ; but they were read on weekdays, and the young couple easily persuaded the curé to do the three readings in twenty-four hours : he was new to the place, and their looks spoke volumes in their favour. They were cried on Monday at matins and at vespers ; and, to their great delight, nobody from Tergou was in the church. The next morning they were both there palpitating with anxiety, when, to their horror, a stranger stood up and forbade the banns, on the score that the parties were not of age, and their parents not consenting.

Outside the church door, Margaret and Gerard held a trembling and almost despairing consultation ; but, before they could settle anything, the man who had done them so ill a turn approached, and gave them to understand that he was very sorry to interfere ; that his inclination was to further the happiness of the young : but that in point of fact his only means of getting a living was by forbidding banns : what then ? The young people give me a crown, and I undo my work handsomely ; tell the curé I was misinformed ; and all goes smoothly.

‘ A crown ? I will give you a golden angel to do this,’ said Gerard, eagerly. The man consented as

eagerly, and went with Gerard to the curé, and told him he had made a ridiculous mistake, which a sight of the parties had rectified. On this the curé agreed to marry the young couple next day at ten : and the professional obstructor of bliss went home with Gerard's angel. Like most of these very clever knaves, he was a fool, and proceeded to drink his angel at a certain hostelry in Tergou, where was a green devoted to archery and the common sports of the day. There, being drunk, he bragged of his day's exploit ; and who should be there, imbibing every word, but a great frequenter of the sport, the ne'er-do-weel Sybrandt. Sybrandt ran home to tell his father ; his father was not at home ; he was gone to Rotterdam to buy cloth of the merchants. Catching his elder brother's eye, he made him a signal to come out, and told him what he had heard.

There are black sheep in nearly every large family : and these two were Gerard's black brothers. Idleness is vitiating : waiting for the death of those we ought to love is vitiating : and these two one-idead curs were ready to tear any one to death that should interfere with that miserable inheritance, which was their thought by day and their dream by night. Their parents' parsimony was a virtue ; it was accompanied by industry, and its motive was love of their offspring : but in these perverse and selfish hearts that homely virtue was perverted into avarice, than which no more fruitful source of crimes is to be found in nature.

They put their heads together, and agreed not to tell their mother, whose sentiments were so uncertain, but to go first to the Burgomaster. They were cunning enough to see that he was averse to the match, though they could not divine why.

Ghysbrecht Van Swieten saw through them at

once ; but he took care not to let them see through him. He heard their story ; and, putting on magisterial dignity and coldness, he said :

‘ Since the father of the family is not here, his duty devolves on me, who am the father of the town. I know your father’s mind ; leave all to me : and, above all, tell no woman a word of all this, least of all the women that are in your own house : for chattering tongues mar the wisest counsels.’

So he dismissed them a little superciliously : he was ashamed of his confederates.

On their return home they found their brother Gerard seated on a low stool at their mother’s knee : she was caressing his hair with her hand, speaking very kindly to him, and promising to take his part with his father and thwart his love no more. The main cause of this change of mind was one that the reader will comprehend, if he has ever known a woman of this kind. It was this. She it was who in a moment of female irritation had cut Margaret’s picture to pieces. She had watched the effect with some misgivings, and had seen Gerard turn pale as death, and sit motionless like a bereaved creature, with the pieces in his hands, and his eyes fixed on them till tears came and blinded them. Then she was terrified at what she had done ; and next her heart smote her bitterly ; and she wept sore apart : but, being what she was, dared not own it, but said to herself, ‘ I’ll not say a word, but I’ll make it up to him.’ And her bowels yearned over her son, and her feeble violence died a natural death, and she was transferring her fatal alliance to Gerard when the two black sheep came in. Gerard knew nothing of the immediate cause : on the contrary, her kindness made this novice ashamed of a suspicion he had for a moment entertained that she was the depredator : and he kissed

her again and again, and went to bed happy as a prince to think his mother was his mother once more at the very crisis of his fate.

The next morning, at ten o'clock, Gerard and Margaret were in the church at Sevenbergen—he radiant with joy, she with blushes. Peter was also there, and Martin Wittenhaagen, but no other friend. Secrecy was everything. Margaret had declined Italy. She could not leave her father; he was too learned and too helpless. But it was settled they should retire into Flanders for a few weeks until the storm should be blown over at Tergou. The curé did not keep them waiting long, though it seemed an age. Presently he stood at the altar, and called them to him. They went hand in hand, the happiest in Holland. The curé opened his book.

But ere he had uttered a single word of the sacred rite, a harsh voice cried 'Forbear'! And the constables of Tergou came up the aisle and seized Gerard in the name of the law. Martin's long knife flashed out directly.

'Forbear, man!' cried the priest. 'What! draw your weapon in a church! And you who interrupt this holy sacrament—what means this impiety?'

'There is no impiety, father,' said the Burgomaster's servant respectfully. 'This young man would marry against his father's will, and his father has prayed our Burgomaster to deal with him according to the law. Let him deny it if he can.'

'Is this so, young man?'

Gerard hung his head.

'We take him to Rotterdam to abide the sentence of the duke.'

At this Margaret uttered a cry of despair, and the young creatures, who were so happy a moment ago,

fell to sobbing in one another's arms so piteously that the instruments of oppression drew back a step, and were ashamed ; but one of them that was good-natured stepped up under pretence of separating them, and whispered :

‘ Rotterdam ? it is a lie ! We but take him to our Stadthouse.’

They took him away on horseback, on the road to Rotterdam ; and, after a dozen halts, and by sly detours, to Tergou. Just outside the town they were met by a rude vehicle covered with canvas. Gerard was put into this, and about five in the evening was secretly conveyed into the prison of the Stadthouse. He was taken up several flights of stairs and thrust into a small room lighted only by a narrow window, with a vertical iron bar. The whole furniture was a huge oak chest.

Imprisonment in those days was one of the high roads to death. It is horrible in its mildest form ; but in these days it implied cold, unbroken solitude, torture, starvation, and often poison. Gerard felt he was in the hands of an enemy.

‘ Oh, the look that man gave me on the road to Rotterdam. There is more here than my father's wrath. I doubt I shall see no more the light of day.’ And he kneeled down and commended his soul to God.

Then he rose and sprang at the iron bar of the window and clutched it. This enabled him, by pressing his knees against the wall, to look out. It was but for a minute ; but, in that minute, he saw a sight that none but a captive can appreciate.

He saw Martin Wittenhaagen's back.

Martin was sitting, quietly fishing in the brook near the Stadthouse.

Gerard sprang again at the window, and whistled. Martin instantly showed that he was watching much



harder than he was fishing. He turned hastily round and saw Gerard ; made him a signal, and taking up his line and bow went quickly off.

Gerard saw by this that his friends were not idle, yet he had rather Martin had stayed. The very sight of him was a comfort. He held on, looking at the soldier's retiring form as long as he could, then falling back somewhat heavily, wrenched the rusty iron bar—held only by rusty nails—away from the stonework just as Ghysbrecht Van Swieten opened the door stealthily behind him. The Burgomaster's eye fell instantly on the iron, and then glanced at the window ; but he said nothing. The window was eighty feet high ; and if Gerard had a fancy for jumping out, why should he balk it ? He brought a brown loaf and a pitcher of water, and set them on the chest in solemn silence. Gerard's first impulse was to brain him with the iron bar, and fly down the stairs ; but the Burgomaster seeing something wicked in his eye, gave a little cough, and three stout fellows, armed, showed themselves directly at the door.

‘ My orders are to keep you thus until you shall bind yourself by an oath to leave Margaret Brandt, and return to the church to which you have belonged from infancy.

‘ Death sooner ! ’

‘ As you please.’ And the Burgomaster retired.

Martin went with all speed to Sevenbergen ; there he found Margaret pale and agitated, but full of resolution and energy. She was just finishing a letter to the Countess Charolois, appealing to her against the violence and treachery of Ghysbrecht.

‘ Courage ! ’ cried Martin, on entering. ‘ I have found him. He is in the haunted tower ; right at the top of it. Aye ! I know the place : many a poor

fellow has gone up there straight, and come down feet foremost.'

He then told them how he had looked up and seen Gerard's face at a window that was like a slit in the wall.

'Oh, Martin! how did he look?'

'What mean you? He looked like Gerard Gerardssoen.'

'But was he pale?'

'A little.'

'Looked he anxious? Looked he like one doomed?'

'Nay, nay; as bright as a pewter pot.'

'You mock me. Ah! then that was at sight of you. He counts on us. Oh! what shall we do? Martin, good friend, take this at once to Rotterdam.'

Martin held out his hand for the letter, but was interrupted.

Peter had sat silent all this time, but pondering, and, contrary to his usual custom, keenly attentive to what was going on around him.

'Put not your trust in princes,' said he.

'Alas! what else have we to trust in?'

'Knowledge.'

'Alas, father! your learning will not serve us here.'

'How know you that? Wit has been too strong for iron bars ere to-day.'

'Aye, father; but nature is stronger than wit, and she is against us. Think of the height! No ladder in Holland might reach.'

'I need no ladder: what I need is a gold crown.'

'Nay, I have money, for that matter. I have nine angels. Gerard gave them me to keep; but what do they avail? The Burgomaster will not be bribed to let Gerard free.'

'What do they avail? Give me but one crown, and the young man shall sup with us this night.'

Peter spoke so eagerly and confidently, that for a moment Margaret felt hopeful ; but she caught Martin's eye dwelling upon him with an expression of benevolent contempt.

'It passes the powers of man's invention,' said she, with a deep sigh.

'Invention ?' cried the old man. A fig for invention ! What need we invention at this time of day ? Everything has been said that is to be said, and done that can be done. I shall tell you how a Florentine knight was shut up in a tower higher than Gerard's : yet did his faithful squire stand at the tower foot and get him out, with no other engine than that in your hand, Martin, and certain kickshaws I shall buy for a crown.'

Martin looked at his bow, and turned it round in his hand ; and seemed to interrogate it. But the examination left him as incredulous as before.

Then Peter told them his story, how the faithful squire got the knight out of a high tower at Brescia. The manœuvre, like most things that are really scientific, was so simple, that now their wonder was they had taken for impossible a thing which was not even difficult.

The letter never went to Rotterdam. They trusted to Peter's learning and their own dexterity.

It was nine o'clock on a clear moonlight night ; Gerard, senior, was still away ; the rest of his little family had been sometime a-bed.

A figure stood by the dwarf's bed. It was white, and the moonlight shone on it.

With an unearthly noise, between a yell and a snarl, the gymnast rolled off his bed and under it by a single unbroken movement. A soft voice followed him in his retreat.

‘ Why, Giles, are you afeard of me ? ’

At this, Giles’s head peeped cautiously out, and he saw it was only his sister Kate.

She put her finger to her lips. ‘ Hush ! lest the wicked Cornelis or the wicked Sybrandt hear us.’

She then revealed to Giles, that she had heard Cornelis and Sybrandt mention Gerard’s name ; and being herself in great anxiety at his not coming home all day, had listened at their door, and had made a fearful discovery. Gerard was in prison, in the haunted tower of the Stadthouse. He was there it seemed by their father’s authority. But here must be some treachery ; for how could their father have ordered this cruel act ? he was at Rotterdam. She ended by entreating Giles to bear her company to the foot of the haunted tower, to say a word of comfort to poor Gerard, and let him know their father was absent, and would be sure to release him on his return.

‘ Dear Giles, I would go alone, but I am afeard of the spirits that men say do haunt the tower : but with you I shall not be afeard.’

‘ Nor I with you,’ said Giles. ‘ I don’t believe there are any spirits in Tergou. I never saw one. This last was the likest one ever I saw ; and it was only you, Kate, after all.’

In less than half an hour Giles and Kate opened the house door cautiously and issued forth. She made him carry a lantern, though the night was bright. ‘ The lantern gives me more courage against the evil spirits,’ said she.

The first day of imprisonment is very trying, especially if to the horror of captivity is added the horror of utter solitude. I observe that in our own day a great many persons commit suicide during

the first twenty-four hours of the solitary cell. This is doubtless why our Jairi abstain so carefully from the impertinence of watching their little experiment upon the human soul at that stage of it.

As the sun declined, Gerard's heart too sank and sank : with the waning light, even the embers of hope went out. He was faint, too, with hunger ; for he was afraid to eat the food Ghysbrecht had brought him : and hunger alone cowed men. He sat upon the chest, his arms and his head drooping before him, a picture of despondency. Suddenly something struck the wall beyond him very sharply, and then rattled on the floor at his feet. It was an arrow ; he saw the white feather. A chill ran through him—they meant then to assassinate him from the outside. He crouched. No more missiles came. He crawled on all fours, and took up the arrow : there was no head to it. He uttered a cry of hope : had a friendly hand shot it ? He took it up, and felt it all over : he found a soft substance attached to it. Then one of his eccentricities was of grand use to him. His tinder-box enabled him to strike a light : it showed him two things that made his heart bound with delight, none the less thrilling for being somewhat vague. Attached to the arrow was a skein of silk, and on the arrow itself were words written.

How his eye devoured them, his heart panting the while !

Well beloved, make fast the silk to thy knife and lower to us : but hold thy end fast : then count an hundred and draw up.

Gerard seized the oak chest, and with almost super-human energy dragged it to the window : a moment ago he could not have moved it. Standing on the chest and looking down he saw figures at the lower foot. They were so indistinct they looked like one

huge form. He waved his bonnet to them with trembling hand : then he undid the silk rapidly but carefully, and made one end fast to his knife and lowered it till it ceased to draw. Then he counted a hundred. Then pulled the silk carefully up : it came up a little heavier. At last he came to a large knot, and by that knot a stout whipcord was attached to the silk. What might this mean ? While he was puzzling himself Margaret's voice came up to him, low but clear. ' Draw up, Gerard, till you see liberty in your hand.' At the word Gerard drew the whipcord line up, and drew and drew till he came to another knot, and found a cord of some thickness take the place of the whipcord. He had no sooner begun to draw this up than he found that he had now a heavy weight to deal with. Then the truth suddenly flashed on him, and he went to work, and pulled and pulled till the perspiration rolled down him : the weight got heavier and heavier, and at last he was wellnigh exhausted ; looking down he saw in the moonlight a sight that revived him : it was as it were a great snake coming up to him out of the deep shadow cast by the tower. He gave a shout of joy, and a score more wild pulls, and lo ! a stout new rope touched his hand : he hauled and hauled, and dragged the end into his power and instantly passed it through both handles of the chest in succession, and knotted it firmly ; then sat for a moment to recover his breath and collect his courage. The first thing was to make sure that the chest was sound, and capable of resisting his weight poised in mid-air. He jumped with all his force upon it. At the third jump the whole side burst open, and out scuttled the contents, a host of parchments.

After the first start and misgiving this gave him, Gerard comprehended that the chest had not burst

but opened : he had doubtless jumped upon the secret spring. Still it shook in some degree his confidence in the chest's powers of resistance ; so he gave it an ally : he took the iron bar and fastened it with the small rope across the large rope, and across the window. He now mounted the chest, and from the chest put his foot through the window, and sat half in and half out, with one hand on that part of the rope which was inside. It was a nervous moment ; but the free air breathed on his face and gave him the courage to risk what we must all lose one day—for liberty. Many dangers awaited him, but the greatest was the first getting on to the rope outside. Gerard reflected. Finally he put himself in the attitude of a swimmer, his body to the waist being in the prison, his legs outside. Then holding the inside rope with both hands, he felt with his feet for the outside rope, and when he had got it he worked it in between the palms of his feet, and kept it there tight : then he put his left hand on the sill and gradually wriggled out. Then he seized the iron bar and for one fearful moment hung outside from it by his right hand, while his left hand seized the rope down at his knees. It was too tight against the wall for his fingers to get round it higher up. The next moment he left the bar and swiftly seized the rope with the right hand too ; but in this manœuvre his body necessarily descended about a yard, and a stifled cry came up from below. Gerard hung in mid-air. He clenched his teeth, and nipped the rope tight with his feet and gripped it with his hands, and went down slowly hand below hand. He passed by one huge rough stone after another. He saw there was green moss on one or two. He looked up and he looked down. The moon shone upon his prison window : it seemed very near. The fluttering figures below seemed an awful distance.

It made him dizzy to look down : so he fixed his eyes steadily on the wall close to him, and went slowly down, down, down.

He passed a rusty slimy streak on the wall, it was some ten feet long. The rope made his hands very hot. He stole another look up.

The prison window was a good way off, now.

Down—down—down—down.

The rope made his hands sore.

He looked up. The window was so distant, he ventured now to turn his eyes downward again : and then, not more than thirty feet below him were Margaret and Martin, their faithful hands upstretched to catch him should he fall. He could see their eyes and their teeth shine.

‘Take care, Gerard ! Oh, take care ! Look not down.’

‘Fear me not,’ cried Gerard, joyfully, and eyed the wall, but came down faster.

In another minute his feet were at their hands. They seized him ere he touched the ground, and all three clung together in one rapturous, panting embrace.

‘Hush ! away in silence, dear one.’

They stole along the shadow of the wall.

But ere they had gone many yards suddenly a stream of light shot from an angle of the building, and lay across their path like a barrier of fire, and they heard whispers and footsteps close at hand.

‘Back !’ hissed Martin. ‘Keep in the shade.’

They hurried back, passed the dangling rope, and made for a little square projecting tower. They had barely rounded it when the light shot trembling past them, and flickered uncertainly into the distance.

‘A lantern !’ groaned Martin, in a whisper. ‘They are after us.’

‘Give me my knife,’ whispered Gerard. ‘I’ll never be taken alive.’

‘No, no!’ murmured Margaret: ‘is there no way out where we are?’

‘None, none! but I carry six lives at my shoulder:’ and with the word, Martin strung his bow, and fitted an arrow to the string: ‘in war never wait to be struck: I will kill one or two ere they shall know where their death comes from:’ then, motioning his companions to be quiet, he began to draw his bow, and ere the arrow was quite drawn to the head, he glided round the corner ready to loose the string the moment the enemy should offer a mark.

Gerard and Margaret palpitated. They had never seen life taken.

CHAPTER XV

‘I HOPE ’tis the Burgomaster that carries the light,’ said the escaped prisoner, panting with a strange mixture of horror and exultation. The soldier, he knew, would send an arrow through a burgher or a burgomaster, as he would through a boar in a wood.

But who may foretell the future, however near? The bow instead of remaining firm, and loosing the deadly shaft, was seen to waver first, then shake violently, and the stout soldier staggered back to them, his knees knocking and his cheeks blanched with fear. He let his arrow fall, and clutched Gerard’s shoulder.

‘Let me feel flesh and blood,’ he gasped: ‘the haunted tower! the haunted tower!’

His terror communicated itself to Margaret and Gerard. They could hardly find breath to ask him what he had seen.



‘Hush!’ he cried, ‘it will hear you. *Up* the wall! it is going *up* the wall! Its head is on fire. *Up* the wall, as mortal creatures walk upon green sward. If you know a prayer say it! For hell is loose to-night.’

‘I have power to exorcise spirits,’ said Gerárd, trembling. ‘I will venture forth.’

‘Go alone, then!’ said Martin, ‘I have looked on ’t once and live.’

Gerard stepped forth, and Margaret seized his hand and held it convulsively, and they crept out.

Sure enough a sight struck their eyes that benumbed them as they stood. Half-way up the tower, a creature with fiery head, like an enormous glow-worm, was going steadily up the wall: the body was dark, but its outline visible, and the whole creature not much less than four feet long.

At the foot of the tower stood a thing in white, that looked exactly like the figure of a female. Gerard and Margaret palpitated with awe.

‘The rope—the rope! It is going up the rope—not the wall,’ gasped Gerard.

As they gazed, the glow-worm disappeared in Gerard’s late prison, but its light illuminated the cell inside and reddened the window. The white figure stood motionless below.

Such as can retain their senses after the first prostrating effect of the supernatural, are apt to experience terror in one of its strangest forms, a wild desire to fling themselves upon the terrible object. It fascinates them as the snake the bird. The great tragedian Macready used to render this finely in Macbeth at Banquo’s second appearance. He flung himself with averted head at the horrible shadow. This strange impulse now seized Margaret. She put down Gerard’s hand quietly, and stood fascinated; then, all in a

moment, with a wild cry, darted towards the spectre. Gerard, not aware of the natural impulse I have spoken of, never doubted the evil one was drawing her to her perdition. He fell on his knees.

‘Exorcizo vos. In nomine beatae Mariae, exorcizo vos.’

While he was shrieking his incantations in extremity of terror, to his infinite relief he heard the spectre utter a feeble cry of fear. To find that hell had also its little weaknesses was encouraging. He redoubled his exorcisms, and presently he saw the shape kneeling at Margaret’s knees, and heard it praying piteously for mercy.

Poor little spectre ! It took Margaret for the ill spirit of the haunted tower, come flying out on it—to damn it.

Kate and Giles soon reached the haunted tower. Judge their surprise when they found a new rope dangling from the prisoner’s window to the ground.

‘I see how it is,’ said the inferior intelligence taking facts as they came. ‘Our Gerard has come down this rope. He has got clear. Up I go, and see.’

‘No, Giles, no !’ said the superior intelligence blinded by prejudice. ‘See you not this is glamour. This rope is a line the evil one casts out to wile you to destruction. He knows the weaknesses of all our hearts ; he has seen how fond you are of going up things. Where should our Gerard procure a rope ? how fasten it in the very sky like that ? It is not in nature. Holy saints protect us this night, for hell is abroad.’

‘Stuff !’ said the dwarf : ‘the way to hell is down, and this rope leads up. I never had the luck to go up such a long rope. It may be years ere I fall in with such a long rope all ready fastened for me.’

As well be knocked on the head at once as never know enjoyment.'

And he sprung on to the rope with a cry of delight, as a cat jumps with a mew on a table where fish is. All the gymnast was on fire ; and the only concession Kate could gain from him was permission to fasten the lantern on his neck first.

'A light scares the ill spirits,' said she.

And so, with his huge arms, and legs like feathers, Giles went up the rope faster than his brother came down it. The light at the nape of his neck made a glow-worm of him. His sister watched his progress with trembling anxiety. Suddenly a female figure started out of the solid masonry, and came flying at her with more than mortal velocity.

Kate uttered a feeble cry. It was all she could, for her tongue clove to her palate with terror. Then she dropped her crutches, and sank upon her knees, hiding her face and moaning :

'Take my body, but spare my soul ! ' &c.

Margaret (panting). 'Why it is a woman !'

Kate (quivering). 'Why it is a woman !'

Margaret. 'How you frightened me.'

Kate. 'I am frightened enough myself. Oh ! oh ! oh !'

'This is strange. But the fiery-headed thing ! Yet it was with you, and you are harmless. But why are you here at this time of night ?'

'Nay, why are you ?'

'Perhaps we are on the same errand ? Ah ! you are his *good* sister, Kate.'

'And you are Margaret Brandt.'

'Yes.'

'All the better. You love him : you are here. Then Giles was right. He has escaped.'

Gerard came forward, and put the question at rest.

But all further explanation was cut short by a horrible unearthly cry, like a sepulchre exulting aloud:

‘PARCHMENT!—PARCHMENT!—PARCHMENT!’

At each repetition it rose in intensity. They looked up, and there was the dwarf with his hands full of parchments, and his face lighted with fiendish joy, and lurid with diabolical fire. The light being at his neck, a more infernal ‘transparency’ never startled mortal eye. With the word the awful imp hurled the parchment down at the astonished heads below. Down came the records, like wounded wild ducks, some collapsed, others fluttering, and others spread out and wheeling slowly down in airy circles. They had hardly settled, when again the sepulchral roar was heard: ‘Parchment!—Parchment!’ and down pattered and sailed another flock of documents—another followed: they whitened the grass. Finally, the fire-headed imp, with his light body and horny hands, slid down the rope like a falling star, and (business before sentiment) proposed to Gerard an immediate settlement for the merchandise he had just delivered.

‘Hush!’ said Gerard; ‘you speak too loud. Gather them up and follow us to a safer place than this.’

‘Will you not come home with me, Gerard?’

‘I have no home.’

‘You shall not say so, Gerard. Who is more welcome than you will be, after this cruel wrong, to your father’s house?’

‘Father? I have no father,’ said Gerard, sternly. ‘He that was my father is turned my gaoler. I have escaped from his hands; I will never come within their reach again.’

‘An enemy did this, and not our father,’ said Kate. And she told him what she had overheard Cornelis

and Sybrandt say. But the injury was too recent to be soothed. Gerard showed a bitterness of indignation he had hitherto seemed incapable of.

‘Cornelis and Sybrandt are two ill curs that have shown me their teeth and their heart a long while; but they could do no more. My father it is that gave the Burgomaster authority, or he durst not have laid a finger on me, that am a free burgher of this town. So be it, then. I was his son—I am his prisoner. He has played his part—I shall play mine. Farewell the town where I was born and lived honestly, and was put in prison. While there is another town left in creation, I’ll never trouble you again, Tergou.’

‘Oh, Gerard! Gerard!’

Margaret whispered her: ‘Do not gainsay him now. Give his choler time to cool!’

Kate turned quickly towards her. ‘Let me look at your face!’ The inspection was favourable, it seemed, for she whispered: ‘It is a comely face, and no mischief-maker’s.’

‘Fear me not,’ said Margaret, in the same tone. ‘I could not be happy without your love as well as Gerard’s.’

‘These are comfortable words,’ sobbed Kate. Then, looking up, she said, ‘I little thought to like you so well. My heart is willing, but my infirmity will not let me embrace you.’

At this point Margaret turned gently round to Gerard’s sister, and kissed her lovingly.

‘Often he has spoken of you to me, Kate, and often I longed for this.’

‘You, too, Gerard,’ said Kate, ‘kiss me ere you go, for my heart lies heavy at parting with you this night.’

Gerard kissed her, and she went on her crutches home. The last thing they heard of her was a little

patient sigh. Then the tears came and stood thick in Margaret's eyes; but Gerard was a man, and noticed it not.

As they turned to go to Sevenbergen, the dwarf nudged Gerard with his bundle of parchments, and sought remuneration.

Margaret dissuaded Gerard. 'Why take what is not ours?'

'Oh! spoil an enemy how you can.'

'But may they not make this a handle for fresh violence?'

'How can they? Think you I shall stay in Tergou after this? The Burgomaster robbed me of my liberty; I would take his life for it if I could.'

'Oh fie, Gerard!'

'What? Is life worth more than liberty? Well, I can't take his life, so I take the first thing that comes to hand.'

He gave Giles a few small coins, with which the urchin was gladdened, and shuffled after his sister. Margaret and Gerard were speedily joined by Martin, and away to Sevenbergen.

CHAPTER XVI

GHYSBRECHT VAN SWIETEN kept the key of Gerard's prison in his pouch. He waited till ten of the clock ere he visited him; for he said to himself, 'A little hunger sometimes does well; it breaks them.' At ten he crept up the stairs with a loaf and pitcher, followed by his trusty servant well armed. Ghysbrecht listened at the door. There was no sound inside. A grim smile stole over his features. 'By this time he will be as downhearted as Albert Koestein was,' thought he. He opened the door.

No Gerard.

Ghysbrecht stood stupefied.

Although his face was not visible, his body seemed to lose all motion in so peculiar a way, and then after a little he fell a trembling so, that the servant behind him saw there was something amiss, and crept close to him and peeped over his shoulder. At sight of the empty cell and the rope, and iron bar, he uttered a loud exclamation of wonder: but his surprise doubled when his master, disregarding all else, suddenly flung himself on his knees before the empty chest, and felt wildly all over it with quivering hands, as if unwilling to trust his eyes in a matter so important.

The servant gazed at him in utter bewilderment.

‘Why, master, what is the matter?’

Ghysbrecht’s pale lips worked as if he was going to answer; but they uttered no sound: his hands fell by his side, and he stared into the chest.

‘Why, master, what avails glaring into that empty box? He is not there. See here! Note the cunning of the young rogue; he hath taken out the bar, and——’

‘GONE! GONE! GONE!’

‘Gone? What is gone? Holy saints! he is planet struck.’

‘STOP THIEF!’ shrieked Ghysbrecht, and suddenly turned on his servant and collared him, and shook him with rage. ‘D’ye stand there, knave, and see your master robbed? Run! fly! A hundred crowns to him that finds it me again. No, no! ’tis in vain. Oh, fool! fool! to leave that in the same room with him. But none ever found the secret spring before. None ever would but he. It was to be. It is to be. Lost! lost!’ And his years and infirmity now gained the better of his short-lived

frenzy, and he sank on the chest muttering 'lost ! lost !'

'What is lost, master ?' said the servant kindly.

'House and lands and good name : ' groaned Ghysbrecht, and wrung his hands feebly.

'What ? ' cried the servant.

This emphatic word and the tone of eager curiosity struck on Ghysbrecht's ear, and revived his natural cunning.

'I have lost the town records,' stammered he, and he looked askant at the man like a fox caught near a hen-roost.

'Oh, is that all ?'

'Is 't not enough ? What will the burghers say to me ? What will the burgh do ? ' Then he suddenly burst out again, 'A hundred crowns to him who shall recover them ; all, mind, all that were in this box. If one be missing, I give nothing.'

'Tis a bargain, master : the hundred crowns are in my pouch. See you not that where Gerard Gerardssoen is, there are the pieces of sheepskin you rate so high ?'

'That is true ; that is true ; good Dierich : good faithful Dierich ! All, mind, all, that were in the chest.'

'Master, I will take the constables to Gerard's house and seize him for the theft.'

'The theft ? aye ! good ! very good ! It is theft. I forgot that. So as he is a thief now, we will put him in the dungeons below : where the toads are and the rats. Dierich, that man must never see daylight again. 'Tis his own fault. He must be prying. Quick, quick ! ere he has time to talk, you know, time to talk.'

In less than half an hour Dierich Brower and four constables entered the hosier's house and demanded young Gerard of the panic-stricken Catherine.

‘ Alas ! what has he done now ? ’ cried she : ‘ that boy will break my heart.’

‘ Nay, dame, but a trick of youth,’ said Dierich. ‘ He hath but made off with certain skins of parchment, in a frolic doubtless ; but the Burgomaster is answerable to the burgh for their safe keeping, so he is in care about them : as for the youth, he will doubtless be quit for a reprimand.’

This smooth speech completely imposed on Catherine ; but her daughter was more suspicious, and that suspicion was strengthened by the disproportionate anger and disappointment Dierich showed the moment he learned Gerard was not at home—had not been at home that night.

‘ Come away, then,’ said he, roughly. ‘ We are wasting time.’ He added, vehemently, ‘ I’ll find him if he is above ground.’

Affection sharpens the wits, and often it has made an innocent person more than a match for the wily. As Dierich was going out, Kate made him a signal she would speak with him privately. He bade his men go on, and waited outside the door. She joined him.

‘ Hush ! ’ said she, ‘ my mother knows not. Gerard has left Tergou.’

‘ How ! ’

‘ I saw him last night.’

‘ Aye ? Where ? ’ cried Dierich, eagerly.

‘ At the foot of the haunted tower.’

‘ How did he get the rope ? ’

‘ I know not ; but this I know ; my brother Gerard bade me there farewell, and he is many leagues from Tergou ere this. The town, you know, was always unworthy of him, and when it imprisoned him he vowed never to set foot in it again. Let the Burgomaster be content, then. He has imprisoned

him, and he has driven him from his birthplace and from his native land. What need now to rob him and us of our good name ? ’

This might at another moment have struck Dierich as good sense ; but he was too mortified at this escape of Gerard and the loss of a hundred crowns.

‘ What need had he to steal ? ’ retorted he, bitterly.

‘ Gerard stole not the trash : he but *took* it to spite the Burgomaster, who stole his liberty ; but he shall answer to the Duke for it, he shall. Look in the nearest brook or sty, and maybe you shall find these skins of parchment you keep such a coil about.’

‘ Think ye so, mistress ?—think ye so ? ’ And Dierich’s eyes flashed. ‘ Mayhap you know ’tis so.’

‘ This I know, that Gerard is too good to steal, and too wise to load himself with rubbish, going a journey.’

‘ Give you good day, then,’ said Dierich, sharply. The sheepskin you scorn, I value it more than the skin of any he in Tergou.’

And he went off hastily on a false scent.

Kate returned into the house and drew Giles aside.

‘ Giles, my heart misgives me ; breathe not to a soul what I say to you. I have told Dirk Brower that Gerard is out of Holland, but much I doubt he is not a league from Tergou.’

‘ Why, where is he, then ? ’

‘ Where should he be, but with her he loves ? But if so he must not loiter. These be deep and dark and wicked men that seek him. Giles, I see that in Dirk Brower’s eye makes me tremble. Oh ! why cannot I fly to Sevenbergen, and bid him away ? Why am I not lusty and active like other girls ? God forgive me for fretting at His will : but I never felt till now what it is to be lame and weak and useless. But you are strong, dear Giles,’ added she coaxingly—
‘ you are very strong.’

‘ Yes, I am strong ! ’ thundered Perpusillus ; then, catching sight of her meaning, ‘ but I hate to go on foot,’ he added, sulkily.

‘ Alas ! alas ! who will help me if you will not ? Dear Giles, do you not love Gerard ? ’

‘ Yes, I like him best of the lot. I’ll go to Sevenbergen on Peter Buysken his mule. Ask you him, for he won’t lend her me.’

Kate remonstrated. The whole town would follow him. It would be known whither he was gone, and Gerard be in worse danger than before.

Giles parried this by promising to ride out of the town the opposite way, and not turn the mule’s head towards Sevenbergen till he had got rid of the curious.

Kate then assented, and borrowed the mule. She charged Giles with a short but meaning message, and made him repeat it after her, over and over, till he could say it word for word.

Giles started on the mule, and little Kate retired, and did the last thing now in her power for her beloved brother ; prayed on her knees long and earnestly for his safety.

CHAPTER XVII

GERARD and Margaret went gaily to Sevenbergen in the first flush of recovered liberty, and successful adventure. But these soon yielded to sadder thoughts. Neither of them attached any importance to the abstraction of the sheepskins : but Gerard was an escaped prisoner, and liable to be retaken and perhaps punished ; and therefore he and Margaret would have to part for a time. Moreover he had conceived a hatred to his native place. Margaret wished him to leave the country for a while, but at

the thought of his going to Italy her heart fainted. Gerard, on the contrary, was reconciled to leaving Margaret only by his desire to visit Italy, and his strong conviction that there he should earn money and reputation, and remove every obstacle to their marriage. He had already told her all that the demoiselle Van Eyck had said to him. He repeated it, and reminded Margaret that the gold pieces were only given him to go to Italy with. The journey to Italy was clearly for Gerard's interest. He was a craftsman and an artist, lost in this boorish place. In Italy they would know how to value him. On this ground, above all, the unselfish girl gave her consent : but many tender tears came with it, and at that Gerard, young and loving as herself, cried bitterly with her, and often they asked one another what they had done, that so many different persons should be their enemies, and combine, as it seemed, to part them.

They sat hand in hand till midnight, now deploring their hard fate, now drawing bright and hopeful pictures of the future, in the midst of which Margaret's tears would suddenly flow, and then poor Gerard's eloquence would die away in a sigh.

The morning found them resigned to part, but neither had the courage to say when ; and much I doubt whether the hour of parting ever would have struck.

But about three in the afternoon, Giles, who had made a circuit of many miles to avoid suspicion, rode up to the door. They both ran out to him, eager with curiosity. He soon turned that light feeling to dismay.

' Brother Gerard,' cried he, in his tremendous tones, ' Kate bids you run for your life. They charge you with theft ; you have given them a handle. Think

not to explain. Hope not for justice in Tergou ! The parchments you took they are but a blind. She hath seen your death in the men's eyes : a price is on your head. Fly ! For Margaret's sake and all who love you, loiter not life away, but fly !'

It was a thunder-clap, and left two pale faces looking at one another, awestruck.

Then Giles, who had hitherto but uttered by rote what Catherine bade him, put in a word of his own.

'All the constables were at our house after you, and so was Dirk Brower. Kate is wise, Gerard. Best give ear to her rede, and fly.'

'Oh, yes ! Gerard,' cried Margaret, wildly. 'Fly on the instant. Ah ! those parchments ; my mind misgave me : why did I let you take them ?'

'Margaret, they are but a blind : Giles says so : no matter, the old caitiff shall never see them again ; I will not go till I have hidden his treasure where he shall never find it.' Gerard then, after thanking Giles warmly, bade him farewell, and told him to go back, and tell Kate he was gone. 'For I shall be gone, ere you reach home,' said he. He shouted for Martin ; and told him what had happened, and begged him to go a little way towards Tergou, and watch the road.

'Aye !' said Martin, 'and if I see Dirk Brower, or any of his men, I will shoot an arrow into the oak-tree that is in our garden ; and on that you must run into the forest hard by, and meet me at the wierd hunter's spring. Then I will guide you through the wood.'

Surprise thus provided against, Gerard breathed again. He went with Margaret, and while she watched the oak-tree tremblingly, fearing every moment to see an arrow strike among the branches, Gerard dug a deep hole to bury the parchments in.

He threw them in, one by one. They were nearly all charters and records of the burgh : but one appeared to be a private deed between Floris Brandt, father of Peter, and Ghysbrecht.

‘Why this is as much yours as his,’ said Gerard. ‘I will read this.’

‘Oh, not now, Gerard, not now,’ cried Margaret. ‘Every moment you lose fills me with fear ; and see, large drops of rain are beginning to fall, and the clouds lower.’

Gerard yielded to this remonstrance : but he put the deed into his bosom, and threw the earth in over the others, and stamped it down. While thus employed there came a flash of lightning followed by a peal of distant thunder, and the rain came down heavily. Margaret and Gerard ran into the house, whither they were speedily followed by Martin.

‘The road is clear,’ said he, ‘and a heavy storm coming on.’

His words proved true. The thunder came nearer and nearer till it crashed overhead : the flashes followed one another close, like the strokes of a whip, and the rain fell in torrents. Margaret hid her face not to see the lightning. On this, Gerard put up the rough shutter, and lighted a candle. The lovers consulted together, and Gerard blessed the storm that gave him a few hours more with Margaret. The sun set unperceived, and still the thunder pealed, and the lightning flashed, and the rain poured. Supper was set ; but Gerard and Margaret could not eat : the thought that this was the last time they should sup together, choked them. The storm lulled a little. Peter retired to rest. But Gerard was to go at peep of day, and neither he nor Margaret could afford to lose an hour in sleep. Martin sat up a while, too :

for he was fitting a new string to his bow, a matter in which he was very nice.

The lovers murmured their sorrows and their love beside him.

Suddenly the old man held up his hand to them to be silent.

They were quiet and listened, and heard nothing. But the next moment a footstep crackled faintly upon the autumn leaves that lay strewn in the garden at the back door of the house. To those who had nothing to fear such a step would have said nothing : but to those who had enemies it was terrible. For it was a foot trying to be noiseless.

Martin fitted an arrow to his string, and hastily blew out the candle. At this moment, to their horror, they heard more than one footstep approach the other door of the cottage, not quite so noiselessly as the other, but very stealthily—and then a dead pause. Their blood almost froze in their veins.

‘ Oh, Kate ! oh, Kate ! She said, fly on the instant ! ’ And Margaret moaned and wrung her hands in anguish and terror and wild remorse.

‘ Hush, girl ! ’ said Martin, in a stern whisper ; and even at that moment a heavy knock fell on the door.

As if this had been a concerted signal, the back door was struck as rudely the next instant. They were hemmed in. But at these alarming sounds Margaret seemed to recover some share of self-possession. She whispered, ‘ Say he was here, but is gone.’ And with this she seized Gerard and almost dragged him up the rude steps that led to her father’s sleeping-room. Her own lay next beyond it.

The blows on the door were repeated.

‘ Who knocks at this hour ? ’

‘ Open, and you will see ! ’

‘I open not to thieves—honest men are all a-bed now.’

‘Open to the law, Martin Wittenhaagen, or you shall rue it.’

‘Why that is Dirk Brower’s voice, I trow. What make you so far from Tergou?’

‘Open, and you will know.’

Martin drew the bolt, and in rushed Dierich and four more. They let in their companion who was at the back door.

‘Now, Martin, where is Gerard Gerardssoen?’

‘Gerard Gerardssoen? Why he was here but now.’

‘Was here?’ Dierich’s countenance fell. ‘And where is he now?’

‘They say he is gone to Italy. Why? What is to do?’

‘No matter. When did he go? Tell me not that he went in such a storm as this!’

‘Here is a coil about Gerard Gerardssoen,’ said Martin, contemptuously. Then he lighted the candle, and seating himself coolly by the fire, proceeded to whip some fine silk round his bowstring at the place where the nick of the arrow frets it. ‘I’ll tell you,’ said he, carelessly. ‘Do you know his brother Giles—a little misbegotten imp all head and arms? Well, he came tearing over here on a mule, and bawled out something. I was too far off to hear the creature’s words, but I heard its noise. Any way, he started Gerard. For as soon as he was gone, there was such crying and kissing, and then Gerard went away. They do tell me he is gone to Italy—mayhap you know where that is, for I don’t.’

Dierich’s countenance fell lower and lower at this account. There was no flaw in it. A cunninger man than Martin would, perhaps, have told a lie too many, and raised suspicion. But Martin did his task

well. He only told the one falsehood he was bade to tell, and of his own head invented nothing.

‘Mates,’ said Dierich, ‘I doubt he speaks sooth. I told the Burgomaster how ’twould be. He met the dwarf galloping Peter Buysken’s mule from Sevenbergen. “They have sent that imp to Gerard,” says he, “so, then, Gerard is at Sevenbergen.”—“Ah, master!” says I, “’tis too late now. We should have thought of Sevenbergen before, instead of wasting our time hunting all the odd corners of Tergou for those cursed parchments that we shall never find till we find the man that took ’em. If he was at Sevenbergen,” quoth I, “and they have sent the dwarf to him, it must have been to warn him we are after him. He is leagues away by now,” quoth I. “Confound that chalk-faced girl! she has outwitted us bearded men:” and so I told the Burgomaster, but he would not hear reason. A wet jerkin a-piece, that is all we shall get, mates, by this job.’

Martin grinned coolly in Dierich’s face.

‘However,’ added the latter, ‘just to content the Burgomaster, we will search the house.’

Martin turned grave directly.

This change of countenance did not escape Dierich. He reflected a moment.

‘Watch outside two of you, one on each side of the house, that no one jump from the upper windows. The rest come with me.’

And he took the candle and mounted the stairs, followed by three of his comrades.

Martin was left alone.

The stout soldier hung his head. All had gone so well at first: and now this fatal turn! Suddenly it occurred to him that all was not yet lost. Gerard must be either in Peter’s room or Margaret’s; they were not so very high from the ground. Gerard would leap



out. Dierich had left a man below ; but what then ? For half a minute Gerard and he would be two to one, and in that brief space, what might not be done ?

Martin then held the back door ajar and watched. The light was in Peter's room. 'Curse the fool !' said he, 'is he going to let them take him like a girl ?'

The light passed now into Margaret's bedroom. Still no window was opened. Had Gerard intended to escape that way he would not have waited till the men were in the room. Martin saw that at once, and left the door, and came to the foot-stair and listened. He began to think Gerard must have escaped by the window while all the men were in the house. The longer the silence continued the stronger grew this conviction. But it was suddenly and rudely dissipated.

Piercing shrieks issued from the inner bedroom,—Margaret's.

'They have taken him,' groaned Martin ; 'they have got him.'

It flashed through Martin's mind in one moment that if they took Gerard away his life was not worth a button ; and that, if evil befell him, Margaret's heart would break. He cast his eyes wildly round like some savage beast seeking an escape, and in a twinkling he formed a resolution terribly characteristic of those iron times and of a soldier driven to bay.

CHAPTER XVIII

HE stepped to each door in turn, and imitating Dirk Brower's voice, said sharply, 'Watch the window !' He then quietly closed and bolted both doors. He then took up his bow and six arrows ;

one he fitted to his string, the others he put into his quiver. His knife he placed upon a chair behind him, the hilt towards him; and there he waited at the foot of the stair with the calm determination to slay those four men, or be slain by them. Two, he knew, he could dispose of by his arrows, ere they could get near him, and Gerard and he must take their chance, hand-to-hand, with the remaining pair. Besides, he had seen men panic-stricken by a sudden attack of this sort. Should Brower and his men hesitate but an instant, he should shoot three instead of two, and then the odds would be on the right side.

He had not long to wait. The heavy steps sounded in Margaret's room, and came nearer and nearer.

The light also approached, and voices.

Martin's heart, stout as it was, beat hard, to hear men coming thus to their death, and, perhaps, to his; more likely so than not; for four is long odds in a battle-field of ten feet square, and Gerard might be bound, perhaps, and powerless to help. But this man, whom we have seen shake in his shoes at a Giles-o'-lanthorn, never wavered in this awful moment of real danger, but stood there, his body all braced for combat, and his eye glowing, equally ready to take life and lose it. Desperate game! to win which was exile instant and for life, and to lose it was to die that moment upon that floor he stood on.

Dierich Brower and his men found Peter in his first sleep. They opened his cupboards; they ran their knives into an alligator he had nailed to his wall; they looked under his bed: it was a large room, and apparently full of hiding places, but they found no Gerard.

Then they went on to Margaret's room, and the very sight of it was discouraging—it was small and

bare, and not a cupboard in it ; there was, however, a large fireplace and chimney. Dierich's eye fell on these directly. Here they found the beauty of Sevenbergen sleeping on an old chest, not a foot high, and no attempt made to cover it ; but the sheets were snowy white, and so was Margaret's own linen. And there she lay, looking like a lily fallen into a rut.

Presently she awoke, and sat up in the bed, like one amazed ; then, seeing the men, began to scream violently, and pray for mercy.

She made Dierich Brower ashamed of his errand.

'Here is a to-do,' said he, a little confused. 'We are not going to hurt you, my pretty maid. Lie you still, and shut your eyes, and think of your wedding-night, while I look up this chimney to see if Master Gerard is there.'

'Gerard ! in my room ?'

'Why not ? They say that you and he——'

'Cruel ; you know they have driven him away from me—driven him from his native place. This is a blind. You are thieves ; you are wicked men ; you are not men of Sevenbergen, or you would know Margaret Brandt better than to look for her lover in this room of all others in the world. Oh brave ! Four great hulking men to come, armed to the teeth, to insult one poor honest girl ! The women that live in your own houses must be naught, or you would respect them too much to insult a girl of good character.'

'There, come away, before we hear worse,' said Dierich, hastily. 'He is not in the chimney. Plaister will mend what a cudgel breaks ; but a woman's tongue is a double-edged dagger, and a girl is a woman with her mother's milk still in her.' And he beat a hasty retreat. 'I told the Burgomaster how 'twould be.'

CHAPTER XIX

WHERE is the woman that cannot act a part? Where is she who will not do it, and do it well, to save the man she loves. Nature on these great occasions comes to the aid of the simplest of the sex, and teaches her to throw dust in Solomon's eyes. The men had no sooner retired than Margaret stepped out of bed and opened the long chest on which she had been lying down in her skirt and petticoat and stockings, and night-dress over all; and put the lid, bed-clothes and all, against the wall: then glided to the door and listened. The footsteps died away through her father's room, and down the stairs.

Now in that chest there was a peculiarity that it was almost impossible for a stranger to detect. A part of the boarding of the room had been broken, and Gerard being applied to to make it look neater, and being short of materials, had ingeniously sawed away a space sufficient just to admit Margaret's *soi-disant* bed, and with the materials thus acquired he had repaired the whole room. As for the bed or chest, it really rested on the rafters a foot below the boards. Consequently it was full two feet deep, though it looked scarce one.

All was quiet. Margaret kneeled and gave thanks to Heaven. Then she glided from the door, and leaned over the chest, and whispered tenderly, 'Gerard!'

Gerard did not reply.

She then whispered, a little louder, 'Gerard, all is safe, thank Heaven! You may rise; but, oh! be cautious!'

Gerard made no reply.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder—‘Gerard!’

No reply.

‘Oh! what is this?’ she cried, and her hands ran wildly over his face and his bosom. She took him by the shoulders; she shook him; she lifted him; but he escaped from her trembling hands, and fell back, not like a man, but like a body. A great dread fell on her. The lid had been down. She had lain upon it. The men had been some time in the room. With all the strength of frenzy, she tore him out of the chest. She bore him in her arms to the window. She dashed the window open. The sweet air came in. She laid him in it and in the moonlight. His face was the colour of ashes, his body was all limp and motionless. She felt his heart. Horror! it was as still as the rest! Horror of horrors! she had stifled him with her own body!

CHAPTER XX

THE mind cannot all at once believe so great and sudden and strange a calamity. Gerard, who had got alive into that chest scarce five minutes ago, how could he be dead?

She called him by all the endearing names that heart could think, or tongue could frame. She kissed him and fondled him and coaxed him and implored him to speak to her.

No answer to words of love, such as she had never uttered to him before, nor thought she could utter. Then the poor creature, trembling all over, began to say over that white face little foolish things that were at once terrible and pitiable.

‘Oh, Gerard! I am very sorry you are dead! I am very sorry I have killed you! Forgive me

for not letting the men take you, it would have been better than this! Oh, Gerard! I am very, very sorry for what I have done!’ Then she began suddenly to rave. ‘No! no! such things can’t be, or there is no God! It is monstrous! How can my Gerard be dead? How can I have killed my Gerard? I love him! Oh, God! you know how I love him! He does not. I never told him. If he knew my heart, he would speak to me, he would not be so deaf to his poor Margaret. It is all a trick to make me cry out and betray him: but, no, I love him too well for that. I’ll choke first.’ And she seized her own throat, to check her wild desire to scream in her terror and anguish.

‘If he would but say one word. Oh, Gerard! don’t die without a word. Have mercy on me and scold me! but speak to me: if you are angry with me, scold me! curse me! I deserve it: the idiot that killed the man she loved better than herself. Ah! I am a murderess. The worst in all the world. Help, help! I have murdered him. Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!’

She tore her hair, and uttered shriek after shriek so wild, so piercing, they fell like a knell upon the ears of Dierich Brower and his men. All started to their feet, and looked at one another.

CHAPTER XXI

MARTIN WITTENHAAGEN standing at the foot of the stairs with his arrow drawn nearly to the head, and his knife behind him, was struck with amazement to see the men come back without Gerard: he lowered his bow, and looked open-mouthed at them. They, for their part, were equally surprised at the attitude they had caught him in.

‘Why, mates, was the old fellow making ready to shoot one of *us*?’

‘Stuff!’ said Martin, recovering his stolid composure, ‘I was but trying my new string. There, I’ll unstring my bow, if you think that.’

‘Humph!’ said Dierich, suspiciously, ‘there is something more in you than I understand: put a log on, and let us dry our hides a bit, ere we go.’

A blazing fire was soon made, and the men gathered round it, and their clothes and long hair were soon smoking from the cheerful blaze. Then it was that the shrieks were heard in Margaret’s room. They all started up, and one of them seized the candle, and ran up the steps that led to the bedrooms.

Martin rose hastily, too, and being confused by these sudden screams, and apprehending danger from the man’s curiosity, tried to prevent him from going there.

At this Dierich threw his arms round him from behind, and called on the others to keep him. The man that had the candle got clear away, and all the rest fell upon Martin, and after a long and fierce struggle, in the course of which they were more than once all rolling on the floor, with Martin in the middle, they succeeded in mastering the old Samson, and binding him hand and foot with a rope they had brought for Gerard.

‘That is a good job,’ said Dierich, pointing; ‘our lives weren’t safe while this old fellow’s four bones were free. He makes me think Gerard is hereabouts, for all we can’t find him. Hallo, mates! Jorian Ketel’s a long time in that girl’s bedroom.’

The rude laugh caused by this remark, had hardly subsided, when hasty footsteps were heard running along overhead.

‘Oh! here he comes, at last. Well, Jorian, what is to do now?’

CHAPTER XXII

JORIAN KETEL went straight to Margaret's room, and there he found the man he had been in search of, pale and motionless, his head in Margaret's lap, and she kneeling over him, mute now, and stricken to stone. Her eyes were dilated, yet glazed, and she neither saw the light nor heard the man, nor cared for anything on earth, but the white face in her lap.

Jorian stood awestruck, the candle shaking in his hand.

Why, where was he, then, all the time ?

Margaret heeded him not. Jorian went to the empty chest and inspected it. He began to comprehend. The girl's dumb and frozen despair moved him.

'This is a sorry sight,' said he : 'it is a black night's work : all for a few skins ! Better have gone with us than so. She is past answering me, poor wench ! Stop—let us try.'

He took down a little round mirror, no bigger than his hand, and put it to Gerard's mouth and nostrils, and held it there. When he withdrew it, it was dull. Jorian Ketel gave a joyful cry :

'THERE IS LIFE IN HIM, GIRL !'

At that word, it was as if a statue had started into life and passion. Margaret rose, and flung her arms round Jorian's neck.

'Oh bless the tongue that tells me so !' and she kissed the great rough fellow again and again, eagerly, almost fiercely.

'There, there ! let us lay him warm,' said Jorian ; and in a moment he raised Gerard, and laid him on the bed-clothes. Then he took out a flask he carried, and filled his hand twice with Schiedamze, and flung

it sharply each time in Gerard's face. The pungent liquor co-operated with his recovery—he gave a faint sigh. Oh, never was sound so joyful to human ear ! She flew towards him, but then stopped, quivering for fear she should hurt him. She had lost all confidence in herself.

‘That is right—let him alone,’ said Jorian : ‘don’t go cuddling him as you did me, or you’ll drive his breath back again. Let him alone : he is sure to come to. ’Tisn’t like as if he was an old man.’

Gerard sighed deeply, and a faint streak of colour stole to his lips. Jorian made for the door. He had hardly reached it, when he found his legs seized from behind.

It was Margaret ! She curled round his knees like a serpent, and kissed his hand, and fawned on him. ‘You won’t tell ? You have saved his life ; you have not the heart to thrust him back into his grave, to undo your own good work ?’

‘No, no ! It is not the first time I’ve done you two a good turn ; ’twas I told you in the church whither we had to take him. Besides, what is Dirk Brower to me ? I’ll see him hanged ere I’ll tell him. But I wish you’d tell *me* where the parchments are ? There are a hundred crowns offered for them. That would be a good windfall for my Joan and the children, you know.’

‘Ah ! they shall have those hundred crowns.’

‘What ! are the things in the house ?’ asked Jorian, eagerly.

‘No ; but I know where they are : and, by God and St. Barsos, I swear you shall have them to-morrow. Come to me for them when you will, but come alone.’

‘I were mad, else. What ! share the hundred crowns with Dirk Brower ? And now may my bones

rot in my skin if I let a soul know the poor boy is here !’

He then ran off, lest by staying longer he should excite suspicion, and have them all after him. And Margaret knelt, quivering from head to foot, and prayed beside Gerard, and for Gerard.

‘What is to do ? Why we have scared the girl out of her wits. She was in a kind of fit.’

‘We had better all go and doctor her, then.’

‘Oh yes ! and frighten her into the churchyard. Her father is a doctor, and I have roused him, and set him to bring her round. Let us see the fire, will ye ?’

His off-hand way disarmed all suspicion. And soon after the party agreed that the kitchen of the ‘Three Kings’ was much warmer than Peter’s house, and they departed, having first untied Martin.

‘Take note, mate, that I was right, and the Burgo-master wrong,’ said Dierich Brower, at the door : ‘I said we should be too late to catch him, and we were too late.’

Thus Gerard, in one terrible night, grazed the prison and the grave !

And how did he get clear at last ? Not by his cunningly-contrived hiding-place, nor by Margaret’s ready wit ; but by a good impulse in one of his captors—by the bit of humanity left in a somewhat reckless fellow’s heart, aided by his desire of gain. So mixed and seemingly incongruous are human motives, so short-sighted our shrewdest counsels !

They whose moderate natures, or gentle fates, keep them in life’s passage from the fierce extremes of joy and anguish our nature is capable of, are perhaps

the best, and certainly the happiest, of mankind. But to such readers I should try in vain to convey what bliss unspeakable settled now upon those persecuted lovers. Even to those who have joyed greatly, and greatly suffered, my feeble art can present but a pale reminiscence, and a faint reflection of Margaret's and Gerard's ecstasy.

To sit and see a beloved face come back from the grave to the world, to health and beauty by swift gradations ; to see the roses return to the loved cheek, love's glance to the loved eye, and his words to the loved mouth : this was Margaret's—a joy to balance years of sorrow. It was Gerard's to awake from a trance and find his head pillowed on Margaret's arm ; to hear the woman he adored murmur new words of eloquent love, and shower tears and tender kisses and caresses on him. He never knew, till this sweet moment, how ardently, how tenderly she loved him. He thanked his enemies. They wreathed their arms sweetly round each other, and trouble and danger seemed a world, an age, behind them. They called each other husband and wife. Had they not stood before the altar together ? Was not the blessing of Holy Church upon their union ?—her curse on all who would part them ?

But as no woman's nerves can bear with impunity so terrible a strain, presently Margaret turned faint, and sank on Gerard's shoulder, smiling feebly, but quite, quite unstrung. Thus Gerard was anxious, and would seek assistance. But she held him with a gentle grasp, and implored him not to leave her for a moment. ' While I can lay my hand on you, I feel you are safe, not else. Foolish Gerard ! nothing ails me. I am weak, dearest, but happy, oh ! so happy ! '

Then it was Gerard's turn to support that dear head, with its great waves of hair flowing loose over

him, and nurse her, and soothe her, quivering on his bosom, with soft encouraging words and murmurs of love, and gentle caresses. Sweetest of all her charms is a woman's weakness to a manly heart.

Poor things ! they were happy. To-morrow they must part. But that was nothing to them now. They had seen Death, and all other troubles seemed light as air. While there is life there is hope : while there is hope there is joy. Separation for a year or two, what was it to them, who were so young, and had caught a glimpse of the grave ? The future was bright, the present was heaven : so passed the blissful hours.

Alas ! their innocence ran other risks besides the prison and the grave : they were in most danger from their own hearts and their inexperience, now that visible danger there was none.

Ghysbrecht van Swieten could not sleep all night for anxiety. He was afraid of thunder and lightning, or he would have made one of the party that searched Peter's house. As soon as the storm ceased altogether, he crept downstairs, saddled his mule, and rode to the ' Three Kings ' at Sevenbergen. There he found his men sleeping, some on the chairs, some on the tables, some on the floor. He roused them furiously, and heard the story of their unsuccessful search, interlarded with praises of their zeal.

' Fool ! to let you go without me,' cried the Burgo-master. ' My life on 't he was there all the time. Looked ye under the girl's bed ? '

' No : there was no room for a man there.'

' How know ye that, if ye looked not ? ' snarled Ghysbrecht. ' Ye should have looked under her bed, and in it, too ; and sounded all the panels with your knives. Come, now, get up, and I shall show ye how to search.'

Dierich Brower got up, and shook himself : ' If you find him, call me a horse and no man.'

In a few minutes Peter's house was again surrounded.

The fiery old man left his mule in the hands of Jorian Ketel, and, with Dierich Brower and the others, entered the house.

The house was empty !

Not a creature to be seen, not even Peter. They went upstairs, and then suddenly one of the men gave a shout, and pointed through Peter's window, which was open. The others looked, and there, at some little distance, walking quietly across the fields with Margaret and Martin, was the man they sought. Ghysbrecht, with an exulting yell, descended the stairs, and flung himself on his mule ; and he and his men set off in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIII

GERARD, warned by recent peril, rose before day-break, and waked Martin. The old soldier was astonished. He thought Gerard had escaped by the window last night. Being consulted as to the best way for him to leave the country and elude pursuit, he said there was but one road safe. ' I must guide you through the great forest to a bridle road I know of. This will take you speedily to a hostelry, where they will lend you a swift horse : and then an hour's gallop will take you out of Holland. But let us start ere the folk here quit their beds.'

Peter's house was but a furlong and a half from the forest. They started, Martin with his bow and three arrows, for it was Thursday : Gerard with nothing but a stout oak staff Peter gave him for the journey.



Margaret pinned up her kirtle and farthingale, for the road was wet. Peter went as far as his garden hedge with them, and then, with more emotion than he often bestowed on passing events, gave the young man his blessing.

The sun was peeping above the horizon as they crossed the stony field and made for the wood. They had crossed about half, when Margaret, who kept nervously looking back every now and then, uttered a cry, and, following her instinct, began to run towards the wood, screaming with terror all the way.

Ghysbrecht and his men were in hot pursuit.

Resistance would have been madness. Martin and Gerard followed Margaret's example. The pursuers gained slightly on them ; but Martin kept shouting, ' Only gain the wood ! only gain the wood ! '

They had too good a start for the men on foot, and their hearts bounded with hope at Martin's words, for the great trees seemed now to stretch their branches like friendly arms towards them, and their leaves like a screen.

But an unforeseen danger burst on them. The fiery old Burgomaster had flung himself on his mule, and, spurring him to a gallop, he headed not his own men only, but the fugitives. His object was to cut them off. The old man came galloping in a semicircle, and got on the edge of the wood, right in front of Gerard : the others might escape for ought he cared.

Margaret shrieked twice ; but only once for Gerard.

Ghysbrecht in his ardour had forgotten that hunted animals turn on the hunter ; and that two men can hate, and two can long to kill the thing they hate.

Instead of attempting to dodge him, as the Burgomaster thought he would, Gerard flew right at him with a savage, exulting cry, and struck at him with all his heart and soul and strength. The oak staff

came down on his face with a frightful crash, and laid him under his mule's tail, beating the devil's tattoo with his heels, his face streaming, and his collar spattered, with blood.

The next moment, the three were in the wood. The yell of dismay and vengeance that burst from Ghysbrecht's men at that terrible blow which felled their leader, told the fugitives that it was a race for life or death.

'Why run?' cried Gerard, panting. 'You have your bow; and I have this:' and he shook his bloody staff.

'Boy!' roared Martin; 'the GALLOWS! Follow me!' and he fled into the wood. Soon they heard a cry like a pack of hounds opening on sight of the game. The men were in the wood, and saw them flitting among the trees. Margaret moaned and panted, as she ran; and Gerard clenched his teeth, and grasped his staff. The next minute they came to a stiff hazel coppice. Martin dashed into it, and shouldered the young wood aside as if it were standing corn.

Ere they had gone fifty yards in it they came to four blind paths.

Martin took one. 'Bend low,' said he: and, half-creeping, they glided along. Presently their path was again intersected with other little tortuous paths. They took one of them; it seemed to lead back, but it soon took a turn, and after a while brought them to a thick pine grove where the walking was good and hard: there were no paths here, and the young fir-trees were so thick you could not see three yards before your nose.

When they had gone some way in this, Martin sat down, and, accustomed to lose all impression of danger with the danger itself, took a piece of bread

and a slice of ham out of his wallet, and began quietly to eat his breakfast.

The young ones looked at him with dismay. He replied to their looks.

‘All Sevenbergen could not find you now; you will lose your purse, Gerard, long before you get to Italy: is that the way to carry a purse?’

Gerard looked, and there was a large triangular purse, entangled by its chains to the buckle and strap of his wallet.

‘This is none of mine,’ said he. ‘What is in it, I wonder?’ and he tried to detach it: but in passing through the coppice it had become inextricably entangled in his strap and buckle. ‘It seems loath to leave me,’ said Gerard, and he had to cut it loose with his knife. The purse, on examination, proved to be well provided with silver coins of all sizes, but its bloated appearance was greatly owing to a number of pieces of brown paper folded and doubled. A light burst on Gerard. ‘Why it must be that old thief’s? and see! stuffed with paper to deceive the world!’

The wonder was, how the Burgomaster’s purse came on Gerard.

They hit at last upon the right solution. The purse must have been at Ghysbrecht’s saddle-bow, and Gerard, rushing at his enemy, had unconsciously torn it away, thus felling his enemy and robbing him, with a single gesture.

Gerard was delighted at this feat, but Margaret was uneasy.

‘Throw it away, Gerard, or let Martin take it back. Already they call you a thief. I cannot bear it.’

‘Throw it away? give it him back? not a stiver. This is spoil, lawfully won in battle from an enemy. Is it not, Martin?’

‘Why, of course. Send him back the brown paper as you will ; but the purse or the coin—that were a sin.’

‘Oh, Gerard !’ said Margaret, ‘you are going to a distant land. We need the good will of Heaven. How can we hope for that, if we take what is not ours.’

But Gerard saw it in a different light.

‘It is Heaven that gives it me by a miracle, and I shall cherish it accordingly,’ said this pious youth. ‘Thus the favoured people spoiled the Egyptians, and were blessed.’

‘Take your own way,’ said Margaret, humbly, ‘you are wiser than I am. You are my husband,’ added she, in a low murmuring voice ; ‘is it for me to gainsay you ?’

These humble words from Margaret, who, till that day, had held the whip-hand, rather surprised Martin for the moment. They recurred to him some time afterwards, and then they surprised him less.

Gerard kissed her tenderly in return for her wife-like docility, and they pursued their journey hand-in-hand, Martin leading the way, into the depths of the huge forest. The farther they went the more absolutely secure from pursuit they felt. Indeed, the townspeople never ventured so far as this into the trackless part of the forest.

Impetuous natures repent quickly. Gerard was no sooner out of all danger, than his conscience began to prick him.

‘Martin, would I had not struck quite so hard.’

‘Whom ? Oh, let that pass ; he is cheap served.’

‘Martin, I saw his grey hairs as my stick fell on him. I doubt I shall not get them out of my sight this while.’

Martin grunted. ‘Who spares a badger for his

grey hairs ? The greyer your enemy is, the older ; and the older the craftier ; and the craftier the better for a little killing.'

'Killing ? Killing, Martin ?' don't speak of killing !' And Gerard shook all over.

'I am very much mistaken if you have not,' said Martin, cheerfully.

'Now Heaven forbid !'

'The old vagabond's skull cracked like a walnut. Aha !'

'God and all the saints forbid it !'

'He rolled off his mule like a stone shot out of a cart. Said I to myself, "there is one wiped out."' And the iron old soldier grinned ruthlessly.

Gerard fell on his knees, and began to pray for his enemy's life.

At this Martin lost patience. 'Here's mummary. What, you that set up for learning, know you not that a wise man never strikes his enemy but to kill him ? And what is all this coil about killing of old men ? If it had been a young one now, with the joys of life waiting for him—to wit, wine, women, and pillage—but an old fellow at the edge of the grave, why *not* shove him in ? Go he must, to-day or to-morrow ; and what better place for greybeards ? Now, if ever I should be so mischancy as to last so long as Ghysbrecht did, and have to go on a mule's legs instead of Martin Wittenhaagen's, and a back like this (striking the wood of his bow), instead of this (striking the string), I'll thank and bless any young fellow who will have the charity and the friendship to knock me on the head, as you have done that old shopkeeper, malediction on his memory !'

'Oh, culpa mea ! culpa mea !' cried Gerard, and smote upon his breast.

‘Look there,’ said Martin to Margaret, scornfully, ‘*he is a priest at heart, still* : and, when he is not in ire, St. Paul ! what a milk-sop !’

‘Tush, Martin !’ cried Margaret, reproachfully : then sinking on her knees, she wreathed her arms round Gerard, and comforted him with the double magic of a woman’s sense and a woman’s voice.

‘Sweetheart,’ murmured she, ‘you forget : you went not a step out of the way to harm him, who hunted you to your death. You fled from him. He it was who spurred on you. Then did you strike, but in self-defence, and a single blow, and with that which was in your hand. Malice had drawn knife, or struck again and again. How often have men been smitten with staves not one but many blows, yet no lives lost. If then your enemy has fallen, it is through his own malice, not yours, and by the will of God.’

‘Bless you, Margaret, bless you, for thinking so !’

‘Yes, but, beloved one, if you have had the *misfortune* to kill that wicked man, the more need is there that you fly with haste from Holland. Oh ! let us on.’

Nay, Margaret,’ said Gerard. ‘I fear not man’s vengeance, thanks to Martin here, and this thick wood : only Him I fear whose eye pierces the forest, and reads the heart of man. If I but struck in self-defence, ’tis well ; but if in hate, he may bid the avenger of blood follow me to Italy ; to Italy ? aye, to earth’s remotest bounds.’

‘Hush !’ said Martin, peevishly. ‘I can’t hear for your chat.’

‘What is it ?’

‘Do you hear nothing, Margaret ? My ears are getting old.’

Margaret listened, and presently she heard a tune-

ful sound, like a single stroke upon a deep ringing bell. She described it so to Martin.

‘Nay, I heard it,’ said he.

‘And so did I,’ said Gerard: ‘it was beautiful: Ah! there it is again. How sweetly it blends with the air. It is a long way off. It is before us; is it not?’

‘No, no! the echoes of this wood confound the ear of a stranger. It comes from the pine grove.’

‘What, the one we passed?’

‘The one we passed.’

‘Why, Martin, is this *anything*? You look pale.’

‘Wonderful!’ said Martin, with a sickly sneer. ‘He asks me is it *anything*? Come, on, on! at any rate, let us reach a better place than this.’

‘A better place—for what?’

‘To stand at bay, Gerard,’ said Martin, gravely; ‘and die like soldiers, killing three for one.’

‘What’s that sound?’

‘IT IS THE AVENGER OF BLOOD.’

‘Oh, Martin, save him! Oh, Heaven be merciful! What new, mysterious peril is this?’

‘GIRL, IT’S A BLOODHOUND.’

CHAPTER XXIV

THE courage, like the talent of common men, runs in a narrow groove. Take them but an inch out of that, and they are done. Martin’s courage was perfect as far as it went. He had met and baffled many dangers in the course of his rude life; and these familiar dangers he could face with Spartan fortitude, almost with indifference: but he had never been hunted by a bloodhound; nor had he ever seen that brute’s unerring instinct baffled by human

cunning. Here then a sense of the supernatural combined with novelty to unsteel his heart. After going a few steps he leaned on his bow, and energy and hope oozed out of him. Gerard, to whom the danger appeared slight in proportion as it was distant, urged him to flight.

‘What avails it,’ said Martin, sadly; ‘if we get clear of the wood we shall die cheap; here, hard by, I know a place where we may die dear.’

‘Alas! good Martin,’ cried Gerard: ‘despair not so quickly: there must be some way to escape.’

‘Oh, Martin!’ cried Margaret. ‘What if we were to part company? Gerard’s life alone is forfeit! is there no way to draw the pursuit on us twain, and let him go safe?’

‘Girl, you know not the bloodhound’s nature. He is not on this man’s track, or that; he is on the track of blood. My life on ’t, they have taken him to where Ghysbrecht fell, and from Ghysbrecht’s blood to the man that shed it that cursed hound will lead them, though Gerard should run through an army, or swim the Meuse.’ And again he leaned upon his bow, and his head sank.

The hound’s mellow voice rang through the wood.

A cry more tuneable

Was never halloed to, nor cheered with horn,
In Crete, in Sparta, or in Thessaly.

Strange that things beautiful should be terrible and deadly. The eye of the boa constrictor while fascinating its prey is lovely. No royal crown holds such a jewel; it is a ruby with the emerald’s green light playing ever upon it. Yet the deer that sees it loses all power of motion, and trembles, and awaits his death; and even so to compare hearing with sight, this sweet and mellow sound seemed to fascinate

Martin Wittenhaagen. He stood uncertain, bewildered, and unnerved. Gerard was little better now. Martin's last words had daunted him. He had struck an old man and shed his blood, and by means of that very blood blood's four-footed avenger was on his track. Was not the finger of Heaven in this ?

Whilst the men were thus benumbed, the woman's brain was all activity. The man she loved was in danger.

'Lend me your knife,' said she to Martin. He gave it her.

'But 'twill be little use in your hands,' said he. Then Margaret did a sly thing. She stepped behind Gerard, and furtively drew the knife across her arm, and made it bleed freely : then stooping, smeared her hose and shoes : and still as the blood trickled she smeared them ; but so adroitly that neither Gerard nor Martin saw. Then she seized the soldier's arm.

'Come, be a man !' she said, haughtily, 'and let this end. Take us to some thick place, where numbers will not avail our foes.'

'I am going,' said Martin, sulkily. 'Hurry avails not : we can't shun the hound, and the place is hard by ;' then turning to the left, he led the way, as men go to execution.

He soon brought them to a thick hazel coppice like the one that had favoured their escape in the morning.

'There,' said he, 'this is but a furlong broad, but it will serve our turn.'

'What are we to do ?'

'Get through this, and wait on the other side : then as they come straggling through, shoot three, knock two on the head, and the rest will kill us.'

‘Is that all you can think of?’ said Gerard.

‘That is all.’

‘Then, Martin Wittenhaagen, I take the lead; for you have lost your head. Come, can you obey so young a man as I am.’

‘Oh! yes, Martin,’ cried Margaret, ‘do not gainsay Gerard! He is wiser than his years.’

Martin gave a sullen assent, and they entered the thick coppice.

When they had painfully travelled through half the brushwood, the bloodhound’s deep bay came nearer and nearer, louder and louder.

Margaret trembled.

Martin went down on his stomach and listened.

‘I hear a horse’s feet.’

‘No, said Gerard. ‘I doubt it is a mule’s. That cursed Ghysbrecht is still alive, none other would follow me up so bitterly.’

‘Never strike your enemy but to slay him,’ said Martin, gloomily.

‘I’ll hit harder this time, if Heaven gives me the chance,’ said Gerard.

At last they worked through the coppice, and there was an open wood. The trees were large, but far apart, and no escape possible that way.

And now with the hound’s bay mingled a score of voices, hooping and hallooing.

‘The whole village is out after us,’ said Martin.

‘I care not,’ said Gerard. ‘Listen Martin. The hound will gain on the men, and as soon as he comes out of the coppice, we will kill him.’

‘The hound? There are more than one!’

‘I hear but one.’

‘Aye! but one speaks, the others run mute; but let the leading hound lose the scent, then another shall give tongue. There will be three dogs at least,

or devils in dogs' hides. Then we must kill three, instead of one. The moment they are dead, into the coppice again, and go right back. That is a good thought, Gerard ! ' said Martin, lifting his head.

' Hush ! the men are in the wood.'

Gerard now gave his orders in a whisper.

' Stand you with your bow by the side of the coppice—there, in the ditch ! I will go but a few yards to yon oak-tree, and hide behind it ; the dogs will follow me, and as they come out shoot as many as you can, the rest will I brain as they come round the tree ! '

Martin's eye flashed. They took up their places.

The hooping and hallooing came closer and closer, and even the rustling of the young wood was heard, and every now and then the unerring bloodhound gave a single bay.

' Oh ! it was terrible ! the branches rustling nearer and nearer, and the inevitable struggle for life and death coming on minute by minute, and that death-knell leading it. A trembling hand was laid on Gerard's shoulder. It made him start violently.

' Martin says, if we are forced to part company, make for that high ash-tree we came in by.'

' Yes ! yes ! yes ! but go back for Heaven's sake ! don't come here ! '

She ran back towards Martin ; but, ere she could get to him, suddenly a huge dog burst out of the coppice, and stood erect a moment. He never noticed Margaret. But he lowered his nose an instant, and the next moment, with an awful yell, sprang straight at Gerard's tree, and rolled head-over-heels dead as a stone, literally spitted by an arrow from the bow that twanged beside the coppice in Martin's hand. That same moment out came another hound and smelt his dead comrade. Gerard rushed out at him ;

but ere he could use his cudgel, a streak of white lightning seemed to strike the hound, and he grovelled in the dust, wounded desperately, but not killed, and howling piteously.

Gerard had not time to dispatch him : the coppice rustled too near : it seemed alive with men. Pointing wildly to Martin to go back, Gerard ran a few yards to the right, then crept cautiously into the thick coppice just as three men burst out. These had headed their comrades considerably ; the rest were following at various distances. Gerard crawled back almost on all-fours. Instinct taught Martin and Margaret to do the same upon their line of retreat. Thus, within the distance of a few yards, the pursuers and pursued were passing one another upon opposite tracks.

A loud cry announced the discovery of the dead and the wounded hound. Then followed a babble of voices, still swelling as fresh pursuers reached the spot. The hunters, as usual on a surprise, were wasting time, and the hunted ones were making the most of it.

‘I hear no more hounds,’ whispered Martin to Margaret, and he was himself again.

It was Margaret’s turn to tremble and despair. ‘Oh ! why did we part with Gerard ? They will kill my Gerard, and I not near him !’

‘Nay, nay ! the head to catch him is not on their shoulders. You bade him meet us at the ash-tree.’

‘And so I did ! Bless you, Martin, for thinking of that—to the ash-tree !’

‘Aye ! but with less noise.’

They were now nearly at the edge of the coppice, when suddenly they heard hooping and hallooing behind them. The men had satisfied themselves the fugitives were in the coppice, and were beating back.

‘No matter,’ whispered Martin to his trembling

companion. 'We shall have time to win clear and slip out of sight by hard running. Ah !'

He stopped suddenly ; for just as he was going to burst out of the brush-wood, his eye caught a figure keeping sentinel. It was Ghysbrecht van Swieten seated on his mule ; a bloody bandage was across his nose, the bridge of which was broken ; but over this his eyes peered keenly, and it was plain by their expression he had heard the fugitives rustle, and was looking out for them. Martin muttered a terrible oath, and cautiously strung his bow, then with equal caution fitted his last arrow to the string. Margaret put her hands to her face, but said nothing. She saw this man must die or Gerard. After the first impulse she peered through her fingers, her heart panting audibly.

The bow was raised and the deadly arrow steadily drawn to its head, when at that moment an active figure leaped on Ghysbrecht from behind so swiftly, it was like a hawk swooping on a pigeon. A shirt went over the Burgomaster, and, in a turn of the hand, his head was muffled in it, and he was whirled from his seat and fell heavily upon the ground, where he lay groaning with terror ; and Gerard jumped down after him.

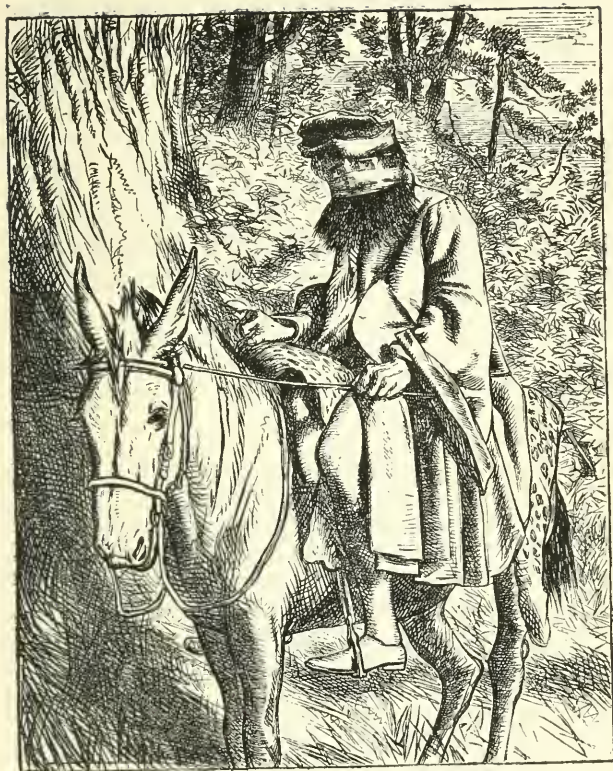
'Hist, Martin ! Martin !'

Martin and Margaret came out, the former open-mouthed, crying, 'Now fly ! fly ! while they are all in the thicket ; we are saved !'

At this crisis, when safety seemed at hand, as fate would have it, Margaret, who had borne up so bravely till now, began to succumb, partly from loss of blood.

'Oh, my beloved ! fly !' she gasped. 'Leave me, for I am faint !'

'No ! no !' screamed Gerard. 'Death together,



or safety ! Ah ! the mule ! mount her ; you, and I'll——'

In a moment Martin was on the mule, and Gerard raised the fainting girl in his arms and placed her on the saddle, and relieved Martin of his bow.

'Help ! treason ! murder ! murder !' shrieked Ghysbrecht, rising on his hams.

'Silence, cur !' roared Gerard, and trode him down again by the throat as men crush an adder. 'Now, have you got her firm ? Then fly ! for our lives !'

But even as the mule, urged suddenly by Martin's heel, scattered the flints with his hind hoofs ere he got into a canter, and even as Gerard withdrew his foot from Ghysbrecht's throat to run, Dierich Brower and his five men, who had come back for orders, and heard the Burgomaster's cries, burst roaring out of the coppice on them.

CHAPTER XXV

SPEECH is the familiar vent of human thoughts : but there are emotions so simple and overpowering, that they rush out not in words, but in eloquent sounds. At such moments man seems to lose his characteristics, and to be merely one of the higher animals ; for these when greatly agitated ejaculate, though they cannot speak.

There was something terrible and truly animal both in the roar of triumph with which the pursuers burst out of the thicket on our fugitives, and in the sharp cry of terror with which these latter darted away. The pursuers' hands clutched the empty air, scarce two feet behind them, as they fled for life. Confused for a moment, like lions that miss their spring, Dierich and his men let Gerard and the mule put ten yards

between them. Then they flew after with uplifted weapons. They were sure of catching them ; for this was not the first time the parties had measured speed. In the open ground they had gained visibly on the trio this morning, and now, at last, it was a fair race again, to be settled by speed alone. A hundred yards were covered in no time. Yet still there remained these ten yards between the pursuers and the pursued.

This increase of speed since the morning puzzled Dierich Brower. But I think I understand it. When three run in company, the pace is that of the slowest of the three. From Peter's house to the edge of the forest Gerard ran Margaret's pace ; but now he ran his own ; for the mule was fleet, and could have left them all far behind. Moreover, youth and chaste living began to tell. Daylight grew imperceptibly between the hunted ones and the hunters. Then Dierich made a desperate effort, and gained two yards ; but in a few seconds Gerard had stolen them quickly back. The pursuers began to curse.

Martin heard, and his face lighted up. ' Courage Gerard ! courage, brave lad ! they are straggling.'

It was so. Dierich was now headed by one of his men, and another dropped into the rear altogether.

They came to a rising ground, not sharp, but long ; and here youth, and grit, and honest living, told more than ever.

Ere he reached the top, Dierich's forty years weighed him down like forty bullets. ' Our cake is dough,' he gasped. ' Take him dead, if you can't alive : ' and he left off running, and followed at a foot's pace. Jorian Ketel tailed off next ; and then another, and so, one by one, Gerard ran them all to a standstill, except one who kept on staunch as a bloodhound, though losing ground every minute. His name, if

I am not mistaken, was Eric Wouverman. Followed by this one, they came to a rise in the wood, shorter, but much steeper than the last.

‘Hand on mane!’ cried Martin.

Gerard obeyed, and the mule helped him up the hill faster even than he was running before.

At the sight of this manœuvre, Dierich’s man lost heart, and, being now full eighty yards behind Gerard, and rather more than that in advance of his nearest comrade, he pulled up short, and in obedience to Dierich’s order, took down his cross-bow, levelled it deliberately, and just as the trio were sinking out of sight, over the crest of the hill, sent the bolt whizzing among them.

There was a cry of dismay; and, next moment, as if a thunderbolt had fallen on them, they were all lying on the ground, mule and all.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE effect was so sudden and magical, that the shooter himself was stupefied for a moment. Then he hailed his companions to join him in effecting the capture, and himself set off up the hill: when up rose the figure of Martin Wittenhaagen with a bent bow in his hand. Eric Wouverman no sooner saw him in this attitude, than he darted behind a tree, and made himself as small as possible. Martin’s skill with that weapon was well known, and the slain dog was a keen reminder of it.

Wouverman peered round the bark cautiously: there was the arrow’s point still aimed at him. He saw it shine. He dared not move from his shelter.

When he had been at peep-bo some minutes, his companions came up, and then, with a scornful

laugh, Martin vanished, and presently was heard to ride off on the mule.

All the men ran up together. The high ground commanded a view of a narrow but almost interminable glade.

They saw Gerard and Margaret running along at a prodigious distance ; they looked like gnats ; and Martin galloping after them *ventre à terre*.

The hunters were outwitted as well as outrun. A few words will explain Martin's conduct. We arrive at causes by noting coincidences : yet, now and then, coincidences are deceitful. As we have all seen a hare tumble over a briar just as the gun went off, and so raise expectations, then dash them to earth by scudding away untouched, so the Burgo-master's mule put her foot in a rabbit-hole, at or about the time the cross-bow bolt whizzed innocuous over her head : she fell and threw both her riders. Gerard caught Margaret, but was carried down by her weight and impetus. Thus in a moment the soil was strewn with *dramatis personae*.

The docile mule was up again directly, and stood trembling. Martin was next, and looking round found out there was but one in pursuit ; on this he made the young lovers fly on foot, while he checked the enemy as I have recorded.

He now galloped after his companions, and when, after a long race, he caught them, he instantly put Gerard and Margaret on the mule, and ran by their side, till his breath failed, then took his turn to ride, and so in rotation. Thus the runner was always fresh, and long ere they relaxed their speed, all sound and trace of them was hopelessly lost to Dierich and his men. These latter went crestfallen back to look after their chief.

CHAPTER XXVII

LIFE and liberty, while safe, are little thought of : for why ?—they are matters of course. Endangered, they are rated at their real value. In this, too, they are like sunshine, whose beauty men notice not at noon when it is greatest, but towards evening when it lies in flakes of topaz under shady elms. Yet it is feebler then ; but gloom lies beside it and reveals its fire. Thus Gerard and Margaret, though they started at every leaf that rustled louder than its fellows, glowed all over with joy and thankfulness as they glided among the friendly trees in safety and deep tranquil silence, baying dogs and brutal voices yet ringing in their mind's ears.

But presently Gerard found stains of blood on Margaret's ankles.

'Oh, Martin ! Martin ! help ! they have wounded her : the cross-bow !'

'No, no !' said Margaret, smiling to reassure him. 'I am not wounded, nor hurt at all.'

'But what is it, then, in Heaven's name ?' cried Gerard, in great agitation.

'Do not scold me, then !' and Margaret blushed.

'Did I ever scold you ?'

'No, dear Gerard. Well, then, Martin said it was blood those cruel dogs followed ; so I thought if I could but have a little blood on my shoon the dogs would follow me instead, and let my Gerard win free. So I scratched my arm with Martin's knife—forgive me ! Whose else could I take ? Yours, Gerard ? Ah, no. You forgive me ?'

'Let me see this scratch first,' said Gerard, choking with emotion. 'There, I thought so. A scratch ? I call it a cut—a deep, terrible, cruel cut.'

Gerard shuddered at sight of it.

‘She might have done it with her bodkin,’ said the soldier. ‘Milksoy ! that sickens at sight of a scratch and a little blood.’

‘No, no. I could look on a sea of blood ; but not on hers. Oh, Margaret ! how could you be so cruel ?’

Margaret smiled with love ineffable. ‘Foolish Gerard,’ murmured she, ‘to make so much of nothing.’ And she flung the guilty arm round his neck. ‘As if I would not give all the blood in my heart for you, let alone a few drops from my arm.’ And the next moment, under the sense of his recent danger, she wept on his neck for pity and love : and he wept with her.

‘And I must part from her,’ he sobbed, ‘we two that love so dear—one must be in Holland, one in Italy. Ah me ! ah me ! ah me !’

At this Margaret wept afresh, but patiently and silently. Instinct is never off its guard, and with her unselfishness was an instinct. To utter her present thoughts would be to add to Gerard’s misery at parting, so she wept in silence.

Suddenly they emerged upon a beaten path, and Martin stopped.

‘This is the bridle-road I spoke of,’ said he, gravely, ‘and there away lies the hostelry.’

Margaret and Gerard cast a scared look at one another.

‘Come a step with me, Martin,’ whispered Gerard. When he had drawn him aside, he said to him in a broken voice, ‘Oh, Martin ! watch over her for me ! She is my wife—yet I leave her. See Martin ! here is gold—it was for my journey ; it is no use my asking her to take it—she would not ; but you will for her, will you not ? Oh, Heaven ! and is this all I can do for her ? Money ? But poverty is a curse. You

will not let her want for anything, Martin ? The Burgomaster's silver is enough for me.'

'Thou art a good lad, Gerard. Neither want nor harm shall come to her. I care more for her little finger than for all the world : and were she nought to me, even for thy sake would I be a father to her. Go with a stout heart, and God be with thee going and coming.' And the rough soldier wrung Gerard's hand and turned his head away.

After a moment's silence, he was for going back to Margaret ; but Gerard stopped him. 'No, good Martin : prithee, stay here behind this thicket, while I—O, Martin ! Martin !'

By this means Gerard escaped a witness of his anguish at leaving her he loved, and Martin escaped a piteous sight, on which I myself would rather not dwell. He did not see the poor young things kneel and renew before Heaven those holy vows cruel men had interrupted. He did not see them cling together like one, and then try to part, and fail, and return to one another, and cling again, like drowning despairing creatures. But he heard Gerard sob, and sob, and Margaret moan.

At last there was a wild cry, and feet pattered on the hard road.

He started up, and there was Gerard running wildly, with both hands clasped above his head, in prayer, and Margaret tottering towards him with palms extended piteously, as if for help, and ashy cheek, and eyes fixed on vacancy.

He caught her in his arms, and spoke words of comfort to her ; but her mind could not take them in ; only at the sound of his voice she held him tight, and trembled violently.

He got her on the mule, and put his arm round

her, and so, supporting her frame, which was now all relaxed and powerless, he took her slowly and sadly home.

She did not shed one tear, nor speak one word.

At the edge of the wood he took her off the mule, and bade her go across to her father's house. She did as she was bid.

Martin to Rotterdam. Sevenbergen was too hot for him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JORIAN KETEL came to Peter's house to claim Margaret's promise ; but Margaret was ill in bed, and Peter, on hearing his errand, affronted him and warned him off the premises, and one or two that stood by were for ducking him ; for both father and daughter were favourites, and the whole story was in every mouth, and the Sevenbergans in that state of hot, indiscriminating irritation which accompanies popular sympathy.

So Jorian Ketel went off in dudgeon, and repented him of his good deed. This sort of penitence is not rare, and has the merit of being sincere. Dierich Brower, who was discovered at 'The Three Kings', making a chatterbox drunk in order to worm out of him the whereabouts of Martin Wittenhaagen, was actually taken and flung into a horse-pond, and threatened with worse usage, should he ever show his face in the burgh again ; and finally, municipal jealousy being roused, the Burgomaster of Sevenbergen sent a formal missive to the Burgomaster of Tergou, reminding him he had overstepped the law, and requesting him to apply to the authorities of Sevenbergen on any future occasion when he might

have a complaint, real or imaginary, against any of the townsfolk.

The wily Ghysbrecht, suppressing his rage at this remonstrance, sent back a civil message to say that the person he had followed to Sevenbergen was a Tergovan, one Gerard, and that he had stolen the town records : that Gerard having escaped into foreign parts, and probably taken the documents with him, the whole matter was at an end ; and that he should not think of molesting his friend Peter Brandt, now there was no longer any good to be gained by it.

Thus he made a virtue of necessity. But in reality his calmness was but a veil : baffled at Sevenbergen, he turned his views elsewhere. He set his emissaries to learn from the family at Tergou whither Gerard had fled, and to his infinite surprise he found they did not know. This added to his uneasiness. It made him fear Gerard was only lurking in the neighbourhood : he would make a certain discovery, and would come back and take a terrible revenge. From this time Dierich and others were about him noticed a change for the worse in Ghysbrecht Van Swieten. He became a moody, irritable man. A dread lay on him. His eyes were for ever casting furtive glances like one who expects a blow, and knows not from what quarter it is to come. Making others wretched had not made him happy. It seldom does. The little family at Tergou, which but for his violent interference might in time have cemented its difference without banishing *spem gregis* to a distant land, wore still the same outward features, but within was no longer the simple happy family this tale opened with. Little Kate knew the share Cornelis and Sybrandt had had in banishing Gerard, and though, for fear of making more mischief still, she never told her mother, yet there were times she shuddered at

the bare sight of them, and blushed at their hypocritical regrets: she could not help it. Catherine with a woman's vigilance noticed this, and with a woman's subtlety said nothing, but quietly pondered it, and went on watching for more. The black sheep themselves, in their efforts to partake in the general gloom and sorrow, succeeded so far as to impose upon their father and Giles: but the demure satisfaction that lay at the bottom of them could not escape these feminine eyes—

That, noting all, seem'd nought to note.

Thus mistrust and suspicion sat at the table, poor substitutes for Gerard's intelligent face, that had brightened the whole circle, unobserved till now. As for the old hosier, his pride had been wounded by his son's disobedience, and so he bore stiffly up, and did his best never to mention Gerard's name; but underneath his Spartan cloak Nature might often be seen tugging at his heart-strings. One anxiety he never affected to conceal. 'If I but knew where the boy is, and that his life and health are in no danger, small would be my care,' would he say; and then a deep sigh would follow. (I can't help thinking that if Gerard had opened the door just then, and walked in, there would have been many tears and embraces for him, and few reproaches, or none.)

One thing took the old couple quite by surprise—publicity. Ere Gerard had been gone a week, his adventures were in every mouth; and, to make matters worse, the popular sympathy declared itself warmly on the side of the lovers, and against Gerard's cruel parents, and that old busy-body the Burgo-master, 'who must put his nose into a business that nowise concerned him.'

One feeling in Catherine's mind was bitterly strong, and deprived an unfortunate young creature of a sympathy that she lay longing for, though not daring to hope for it.

'Mother,' said Kate, 'it is all over the town that Margaret is down with a fever—a burning fever; her father fears her sadly.'

'Margaret? what Margaret?' inquired Catherine, with a treacherous assumption of calmness and indifference.

'Oh, mother! whom should I mean? Why Gerard's Margaret.'

'Gerard's Margaret!' screamed Catherine; 'how dare you say such a word to me? And I rede you never mention that hussey's name in this house, that she has laid bare. She is the ruin of my poor boy:—the flower of all my flock. She is the cause that he is not a holy priest in the midst of us, but is roaming the world, and that I am a desolate broken-hearted mother. There, do not cry, my girl, I do ill to speak harsh to you. But, oh, Kate! you don't know what passes in a mother's heart. I bear up before you all; it behoves me swallow my fears: but at night I see him in my dreams, and always some trouble or other near him: sometimes I see him torn by wild beasts; sometimes he is in the hands of robbers, and their cruel knives uplifted to strike his poor pale face, that one would think would move a stone. Oh! when I think that while I sit here in comfort, perhaps my poor boy lies dead in some savage place: and all along of that girl: there, her very name is ratsbane to me. I tremble all over when I hear it.'

'I'll not say anything, nor do anything to grieve you worse, mother,' said Kate tenderly; but she sighed.

She whose name was so fiercely interdicted in this house, was much spoken of, and even pitied, elsewhere. All Sevenbergen was sorry for her, and the young men and maidens cast many a pitying glance, as they passed, at the little window where the beauty of the village lay dying for love. In this familiar phrase they underrated her spirit and unselfishness. Gerard was not dead, and she was too loyal herself to doubt his constancy. Her father was dear to her and helpless; and, but for bodily weakness, all her love for Gerard would not have kept her from doing her duties, though she might have gone about them with drooping head and heavy heart. But physical and mental excitement had brought on an attack of fever so violent, that nothing but youth and constitution saved her. The malady left her at last, but in that terrible state of bodily weakness in which the patient feels life a burden.

Then it is that love and friendship by the bedside are mortal angels with comfort in their voices, and healing in their palms.

But this poor girl had to come back to life and vigour how she could. Many days she lay alone, and the heavy hours rolled like leaden waves over her. In her enfeebled state existence seemed a burden, and life a thing gone by. She could not try to get well. Gerard was gone. She had not him to get well for. Often she lay for hours quite still, with the tears welling gently out of her eyes.

But one day, waking from an uneasy slumber, she found two women in her room. One was a servant, the other, by the deep fur on her collar and sleeves, was a person of consideration: a narrow band of silvery hair being spared by her coiffure, showed her to be past the age when women of sense conceal their years. The looks of both were kind and friendly.

Margaret tried to raise herself in the bed, but the old lady placed a hand very gently on her.

‘Lie still, sweetheart ; we come not here to put you about, but to comfort you, God willing. Now cheer up a bit, and tell us, first, who think you we are ?’

‘Nay, madam, I know you, though I never saw you before : you are the demoiselle Van Eyck, and this is Richt Heynes. Gerard has often spoken of you, and of your goodness to him. Madam, he has no friend like you near him now,’ and she lay back, and the tears welled out of her eyes.

The good-natured Richt Heynes began to cry for company ; but her mistress scolded her. ‘Well, you are a pretty one for a sick-room,’ said she : and she put out a world of innocent art to cheer the patient : and not without some little success. An old woman that has seen life and all its troubles is a sovereign blessing by a sorrowful young woman’s side. She knows what to say, and what to avoid. She knows how to soothe her and interest her. Ere she had been there an hour she had Margaret’s head lying on her shoulder instead of on the pillow, and Margaret’s soft eyes dwelling on her with gentle gratitude.

‘Ah ! this is hair,’ said the old lady, running her fingers through it. ‘Come and look at it, Richt !’

Richt came and handled it, and praised it unaffectedly. The poor child that owned it was not quite out of the reach of flattery (owing, no doubt, to her not being dead).

‘In sooth, madam, I did use to think it hideous : but *he* praised it, and ever since then I have been almost vain of it, God forgive me. You know how foolish those are that love.’

‘They are greater fools that don’t,’ said the old lady, sharply.

Margaret opened her lovely eyes, and looked at her for her meaning.

This was only the first of many visits. In fact either Margaret Van Eyck or Richt came nearly every day until their patient was convalescent : and she improved rapidly under their hands. Richt attributed this principally to certain nourishing dishes she prepared in Peter's kitchen : but Margaret herself thought more of the kind words and eyes that kept telling her she had friends to live for. Her gratitude to her old friend was ardent and touching, and there was no mistaking its depth and sincerity.

Martin Wittenhaagen went straight to Rotterdam, to take the bull by the horns. The bull in question was Philip the Good, duke of this, earl of that, lord of the other. Arrived at Rotterdam, he found the court was at Ghent. To Ghent he went, and sought an audience, but was put off and baffled by lackeys and pages. So he threw himself in his sovereign's way out hunting, and, contrary to all court precedents, commenced the conversation—by roaring lustily for mercy.

'Why, where is the peril, man ?' said the duke, looking all round, and laughing.

'Grace for an old soldier hunted down by burghers !'

Now kings differ in character like other folk ; but there is one trait they have in common ; they are mightily inclined to be affable to men of very low estate indeed. These do not vie with them in anything whatever, so jealousy cannot creep in ; and they amuse them by their bluntness and novelty, and refresh them with a touch of nature—a rarity in courts. So Philip the Good reined in his horse and gave Martin almost a *tête-à-tête*, and Martin reminded him of a certain battle-field where he had received an arrow intended for his sovereign. The Duke remembered

the incident perfectly, and was graciously pleased to take a cheerful view of it. He could afford to. Then Martin told his sovereign of Gerard's first capture in the church, his imprisonment in the tower, and the manœuvre by which they got him out, and all the details of the hunt ; and, whether he told it better than I have, or that the Duke had not heard so many good stories as you have, certain it is the Duke got so excited, that, when a number of courtiers came galloping up and interrupted Martin, he swore like a costermonger and threatened, only half in jest, to cut off the next head that should come between him and a good story : and when Martin had done, he said :—

‘ St. Luke ! what sport goeth on in this mine earldom—aye ! in my own woods, and I see it not. You fellows have all the luck.’ And he was indignant at the partiality of Fortune. ‘ Lo you now ! this was a man-hunt ! ’ said he. ‘ I never had the luck to be at a man-hunt.’

‘ My luck was none so great,’ replied Martin, bluntly ; ‘ I was on the wrong side of the dogs’ noses.’

‘ Ah ! so you were : I forgot that.’ And royalty was almost reconciled to its lot. ‘ What would you then ? ’

‘ A free pardon, your highness, for myself and Gerard.’

‘ For what ? ’

‘ For prison-breaking.’

‘ Go to : the bird will fly from the cage. ’Tis instinct. Besides, coop a young man up for loving a young woman ? These burgomasters must be void of common sense. What else ? ’

‘ For striking down the Burgomaster.’

‘ Oh ! the hunted boar will turn to bay. ’Tis his

right, and I hold him less than man that grudges it him. What else ? ’

‘ For killing of the bloodhounds. ’

The Duke’s countenance fell.

‘ ’Twas their life or mine, ’ said Martin eagerly.

‘ Aye ! but I can’t have my bloodhounds, my beautiful bloodhounds, sacrificed to—— ’

‘ No, no, no ! They were not your dogs. ’

‘ Whose then ? ’

‘ The ranger’s. ’

‘ Oh. Well, I am very sorry for him, but, as I was saying, I can’t have my old soldiers sacrificed to his bloodhounds. Thou shalt have thy free pardon. ’

‘ And poor Gerard ? ’

‘ And poor Gerard too, for thy sake. And more, tell thou this Burgomaster his doings mislike me : this is to set up for a king, not a burgomaster. I’ll have no kings in Holland but one. Bid him be more humble, or by St. Jude I’ll hang him before his own door, as I hanged the Burgomaster of what ’s the name, some town or other in Flanders it was : no, ’twas somewhere in Brabant—no matter—I hanged him, I remember that much—for oppressing poor folk. ’

The Duke then beckoned his chancellor, a pursy old fellow that sat his horse like a sack, and bade him write out a free pardon for Martin and one Gerard.

This precious document was drawn up in form and signed next day, and Martin hastened home with it.

Margaret had left her bed some days, and was sitting pale and pensive by the fireside, when he burst in, waving the parchment, and crying, ‘ A free pardon, girl, for Gerard as well as me ! Send for him back when you will ; all the burgomasters on earth daren’t lay a finger on him. ’

She flushed all over with joy, and her hands trembled with eagerness as she took the parchment, and devoured it with her eyes, and kissed it again and again, and flung her arms round Martin's neck, and kissed *him*. When she was calmer, she told him Heaven had raised her up a friend in the dame Van Eyck. 'And I would fain consult her on this good news : but I have not strength to walk so far.'

'What need to walk ? There is my mule.'

'Your mule, Martin ?'

The old soldier or professional pillager laughed, and confessed he had got so used to her, that he forgot at times Ghysbrecht had a prior claim. To-morrow he would turn her into the Burgomaster's yard, but to-night she should carry Margaret to Tergou.

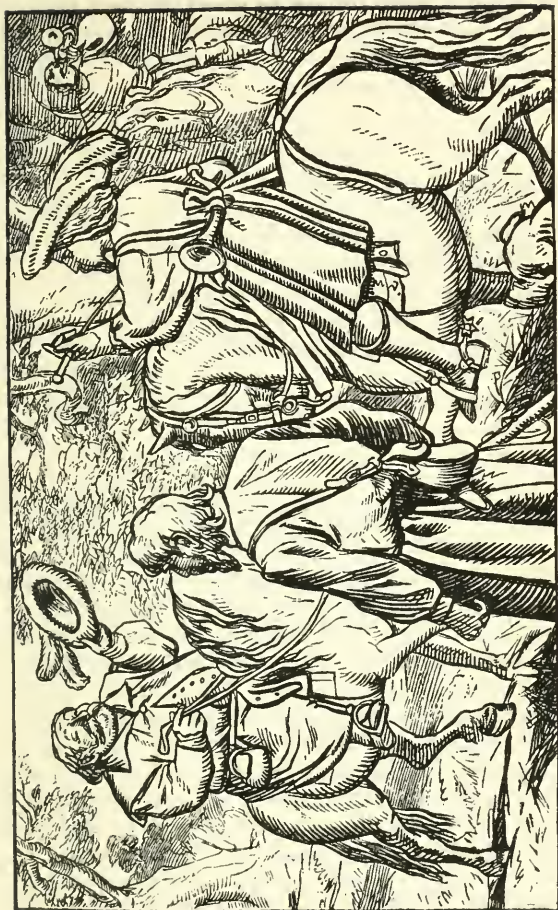
It was nearly dusk ; so Margaret ventured, and about seven in the evening she astonished and gladdened her new but ardent friend by arriving at her house—with unwonted roses on her cheeks, and Gerard's pardon in her bosom.

CHAPTER XXIX

SOME are old in heart at forty, some are young at eighty. Margaret Van Eyck's heart was an ever-green. She loved her young namesake with youthful ardour. Nor was this new sentiment a mere caprice : she was quick at reading character, and saw in Margaret Brandt that which in one of her own sex goes far with an intelligent woman—genuineness. But, besides her own sterling qualities, Margaret Brandt had from the first a potent ally in the old artist's bosom.

Human nature.

Strange as it may appear to the unobservant, our



hearts warm more readily to those we have benefited than to our benefactors. Some of the Greek philosophers noticed this ; but the British Homer has stamped it in immortal lines :—

I heard, and thought how side by side
We two had stemmed the battle's tide
In many a well-debated field,
Where Bertram's breast was Philip's shield.
I thought on Darien's deserts pale,
Where Death bestrides the evening gale,
How o'er my friend my cloak I threw,
And fenceless faced the deadly dew.
I thought on Quariana's cliff,
Where, rescued from our foundering skiff.
Through the white breakers' wrath I bore
Exhausted Mortram to the shore ;
And when his side an arrow found,
I sucked the Indian's venom'd wound.
These thoughts like torrents rushed along
To sweep away my purpose strong.

Observe ! this assassin's hand is stayed by memory, not of benefits received, but benefits conferred.

Now Margaret Van Eyck had been wonderfully kind to Margaret Brandt ; had broken through her own habits to go and see her ; had nursed her, and soothed her, and petted her, and cured her more than all the medicine in the world. So her heart opened to the recipient of her goodness, and she loved her now far more tenderly than she had ever loved Gerard, though, in truth, it was purely out of regard for Gerard she had visited her in the first instance.

When, therefore, she saw the unwonted roses on Margaret's cheek, and read the bit of parchment that had brought them there, she gave up her own views without a murmur.

‘Sweetheart,’ said she, ‘I did desire he should stay in Italy five or six years, and come back rich, and, above all, an artist. But your happiness is before all, and I see you can’t live without him, so we must have him home as fast as may be.’

‘Ah, madam! you divine my very thoughts.’ And the young woman hung her head a moment and blushed. ‘But how to let him know, madam? That passes my skill. He is gone to Italy; but what part, that I know not. Stay! he named the cities he should visit. Florence was one, and Rome. But then——’

Finally, being a sensible girl, she divined that a letter, addressed ‘My Gerard—Italy,’ might chance to miscarry, and she looked imploringly at her friend for counsel.

‘You are come to the right place, and at the right time,’ said the old lady. ‘Here was this Hans Memling with me to-day; he is going to Italy, girl, no later than next week—“to improve his hand,” he says. Not before ’twas needed, I do assure you.’

‘But how is he to find my Gerard?’

‘Why, he knows your Gerard, child. They have supped here more than once, and were like hand and glove. Now, as his business is the same as Gerard’s——’

‘What! he is a painter then?’

‘He passes for one. He will visit the same places as Gerard, and, soon or late, he must fall in with him. Wherefore, get you a long letter written, and copy out this pardon into it, and I’ll answer for the messenger. In six months at farthest Gerard shall get it; and when he shall get it, then will he kiss it, and put it in his bosom, and come flying home. What are you smiling at? And now what makes your cheeks so red? And what you are smothering me for, I cannot

think—My darling ! yes ! happy days are coming to my little pearl.'

Meantime, Martin sat in the kitchen, with the black-jack before him and Richt Heynes spinning beside him : and, wow ! but she pumped him that night.

This Hans Memling was an old pupil of Jan Van Eyck and his sister. He was a painter, notwithstanding Margaret's sneer, and a good soul enough, with one fault. He loved the 'nipperkin, canakin, and the brown bowl' more than they deserve. This singular penchant kept him from amassing fortune, and was the cause that he often came to Margaret Van Eyck for a meal, and sometimes for a groat. But this gave her a claim on him, and she knew he would not trifle with any commission she should entrust to him.

The letter was duly written, and left with Margaret Van Eyck ; and, the following week, sure enough, Hans Memling returned from Flanders. Margaret Van Eyck gave him the letter, and a piece of gold towards his travelling expenses. He seemed in a hurry to be off.

'All the better,' said the old artist ; 'he will be the sooner in Italy.'

But as there are horses who burn and rage to start, and after the first yard or two want the whip, so all this hurry cooled into inaction when Hans got as far as the principal hostelry of Tergou, and saw two of his boon companions sitting in the bay window. He went in for a parting glass with them ; but when he offered to pay, they would not hear of it. No ; he was going a long journey ; they would treat him,—everybody must treat him, the landlord and all.

It resulted from this treatment that his tongue

got as loose as if the wine had been oil ; and he confided to the convivial crew that he was going to show the Italians how to paint : next he sang his exploits in battle, for he had handled a pike ; and his amorous successes with females, luckily not present to oppose their version of the incidents. In short, ‘*plenus rimarum erat : huc illuc diffuebat :*’ and among the miscellaneous matters that oozed out, he must blab that he was entrusted with a letter to a townsman of theirs, one Gerard, a good fellow. He added : ‘you are all good fellows :’ and he slapped Sybrandt on the back so heartily, that the breath was driven out of his body.

Sybrandt on this got a long way off ; but listened to every word, and learned for the first time that Gerard was gone to Italy. However, to make sure, he affected to doubt it.

‘My brother Gerard is never in Italy.’

‘Ye lie, ye cur,’ roared Hans, taking instantly the irascible turn, and not remarking that he who now sat opposite him was the same he had eulogized, and hit, when beside him. ‘If he was ten times your brother, he is in Italy. What call ye this ? There, read me that superscription !’ and he flung down a letter on the table.

Sybrandt took it up and examined it gravely ; but eventually laid it down, with the remark that he could not read. However, one of the company, by some immense fortuity, could read ; and, proud of so rare an accomplishment, took it and read it out : ‘To Gerard Gerardson, of Tergou. These by the hand of the trusty Hans Memling, with all speed.’

‘’Tis excellently well writ,’ said the reader, examining every letter.

‘Aye !’ said Hans, bombastically, ‘and small wonder : ’tis writ by a famous hand ; by Margaret,

sister of Jan Van Eyck. Blessed and honoured be his memory ! She is an old friend of mine, is Margaret Van Eyck.'

Miscellaneous Hans then diverged into forty topics.

Sybrandt stole out of the company, and went in search of Cornelis.

They put their heads together over the news : Italy was an immense distance off. If they could only keep him there ?

'Keep him there ? Nothing would keep him long from his Margaret.'

'Curse her !' said Sybrandt. 'Why didn't she die when she was about it !'

'*She* die ! She would outlive the pest to vex us.' And he was wroth at her selfishness in not dying, to oblige.

These two black sheep kept putting their heads together, and tainting each other worse and worse, till at last their corrupt hearts conceived a plan for keeping Gerard in Italy all his life, and so securing his share of their father's substance.

But when they had planned it they were no nearer the execution ; for that required talent : so iniquity came to a standstill. But presently, as if Satan had come between the two heads, and whispered into the right ear of one and the left of the other simultaneously, they both burst out at once with the same word.

'THE BURGOMASTER !'

They went to Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, and he received them at once : for the man who is under the torture of suspense catches eagerly at knowledge. Certainty is often painful, but seldom, like suspense, intolerable.

'You have news of Gerard ?' said he eagerly.

Then they told about the letter and Hans Memling.

He listened with restless eye. 'Who writ this letter?'

'Margaret Van Eyck,' was the reply: for they naturally thought the contents were by the same hand as the superscription.

'Are ye sure?' And he went to a drawer and drew out a paper written by Margaret Van Eyck while treating with the Burgh for her house. 'Was it writ like this?'

'Yes. 'Tis the same writing,' said Sybrandt, boldly.

'Good! And now what would ye of me?' said Ghysbrecht, with beating heart, but a carelessness so well feigned that it staggered them. They fumbled with their bonnets, and stammered and spoke a word or two, then hesitated and beat about the bush, and let out by degrees that they wanted a letter written, to say something that would be sure to keep Gerard in Italy, and this letter they proposed to substitute in Hans Memling's wallet for the one he carried. While these fumbled with their bonnets and their iniquity, and vacillated between respect for a burgo-master and their knowledge that this one was as great a rogue as themselves, and, somehow or other, on their side against Gerard, pros and cons were coursing one another to and fro in the keen old man's spirit. Vengeance said let Gerard come back and feel the weight of the law. Prudence said keep him a thousand miles off. But then prudence said also, why do dirty work on a doubtful chance? Why put it in the power of these two rogues to tarnish your name? Finally, his strong persuasion that Gerard was in possession of a secret by means of which he could wound him to the quick, coupled with his caution, resulted thus: 'It is my duty to aid the citizens that cannot write. But for their matter

I will not be responsible. Tell me, then, what I shall write.'

'Something about this Margaret.'

'Aye, aye ! that she is false, that she is married to another, I'll go bail.'

'Nay, Burgomaster, nay ! not for all the world !' cried Sybrandt ; 'Gerard would not believe it, or but half, and then he would come back to see. No ; say that she is dead.'

'Dead ! what at her age ? will he credit that ?'

'Sooner than the other ? Why she *was nearly* dead, so it is not to say a downright lie, after all.'

'Humph ? And you think that will keep him in Italy ?'

'We are sure of it, are we not, Cornelis ?'

'Aye,' said Cornelis, 'our Gerard will never leave Italy now he is there. It was always his dream to get there. He would come back for his Margaret, but not for us. What cares he for us ? He despises his own family—always did.'

'This would be a bitter pill to him,' said the old hypocrite.

'It will be for his good in the end,' replied the young one.

'What avails Famine wedding Thirst,' said Cornelis.

'And the grief you are preparing for him so coolly :' Ghysbrecht spoke sarcastically, but tasted his own vengeance all the time.

'Oh, a lie is not like a blow with a curtal axe. It hacks no flesh, and breaks no bones.'

'A curtal axe !' said Sybrandt ; 'no, nor even like a stroke with a cudgel !' and he shot a sly envenomed glance at the Burgomaster's broken nose.

Ghysbrecht's face turned white with ire when this adder's tongue struck his wound. But it told, as intended : the old man bristled with hate.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘tell me what to write for you, and I must write it : but, take notice, you bear the blame if aught turns amiss. Not the hand which writes, but the tongue which dictates, doth the deed.’

The brothers assented warmly, sneering within. Ghysbrecht then drew his inkhorn towards him, and laid the specimen of Margaret Van Eyck’s writing before him, and made some inquiries as to the size and shape of the letter ; when an unlooked for interruption occurred ; Jorian Ketel burst hastily into the room, and looked vexed at not finding him alone.

‘Thou seest I have matter on hand, good fellow.’

‘Aye ; but this is grave. I bring good news ; but ’tis not for every ear.’

The Burgomaster rose, and drew Jorian aside into the embrasure of his deep window, and then the brothers heard them converse in low but eager tones. It ended by Ghysbrecht sending Jorian out to saddle his mule. He then addressed the black sheep with a sudden coldness that amazed them :

‘I value the peace of families ; but this is not a thing to be done in a hurry : we will see about it, we will see.’

‘But, Burgomaster, the man will be gone. It will be too late.’

‘Where is he ?’

‘At the hostelry, drinking.’

‘Well, keep him drinking. We will see, we will see.’ And he sent them off discomfited.

To explain all this we must retrograde a step. This very morning, then, Margaret Brandt had met Jorian Ketel near her own door. He passed her with a scowl. This struck her, and she remembered him.

‘Stay,’ said she. ‘Yes ! it is the good man who saved him. Oh ! why have you not been near me

since ? And why have you not come for the parchments ? Was it not true about the hundred crowns ?

Jorian gave a snort : but, seeing her face that looked so candid, began to think there might be some mistake. He told her he had come, and how he had been received.

‘ Alas ! ’ said she, ‘ I knew nought of this. I lay at death’s door.’ She then invited him to follow her, and took him into the garden and showed him the spot where the parchments were buried. ‘ Martin was for taking them up, but I would not let him. *He* put them there, and I said none should move them but you, who had earned them so well of him and me.’

‘ Give me a spade ! ’ cried Jorian, eagerly. ‘ But stop ! No ; he is a suspicious man. You are sure they are there still ? ’

‘ Sure ? I will openly take the blame if human hand hath touched them.’

‘ Then keep them but two hours more, I prithee, good Margaret,’ said Jorian, and ran off to the Stadthouse of Tergou a joyful man.

The rest you have divined.

CHAPTER XXX

THE Burgomaster was also a joyful man as he jogged along towards Sevenbergen, with Jorian striding beside him, giving him assurance that in an hour’s time the missing parchments would be in his hand.

‘ Ah, master ! ’ said he, ‘ lucky for us it wasn’t a thief that took them.’

‘ Not a thief ? not a thief ? what call you him, then ? ’

‘ Well, saving your presence, I call him a jackdaw. This is a piece of jackdaw’s work, if ever there was ; take the thing you are least in want of, and hide it—that’s a jackdaw. I should know,’ added Jorian, oracularly, ‘ for I was brought up with a jackdaw. He and I were born the same year, but he cut his teeth long before me, and, wow ! but my life was a burden for years all along of him. If you had but a hole in your hose no bigger than a groat, in went his beak like a gimlet ; and in the matter of stealing he was Gerard all over. What he wanted least, and any poor Christian in the house wanted most, that went first. Mother was a notable woman, so if she did but look round, away flew her thimble. Father lived by cordwaining, so about sunrise Jack went diligently away with his awl, his wax, and his twine. After that, make your bread how you could ! One day I heard my mother tell him to his face he was enough to corrupt half a dozen children ; and he only cocked his eye at her, and next minute away with the nurseling’s shoe off his very foot. Now this Gerard is tarred with the same stick. The parchments are no more unto him than a thimble or an awl to Jack. He took ’em out of pure mischief and hid them, and you would never have found them but for me.’

‘ I believe you are right,’ said Ghysbrecht, ‘ and I have vexed myself more than need.’

When they came to Peter’s gate he felt uneasy.

‘ I wish it had been anywhere but here.’

Jorian reassured him.

‘ The girl is honest and friendly,’ said he. ‘ She had nothing to do with taking them, I’ll be sworn ! ’ and he led him into the garden. ‘ There, master, if a face is to be believed, here they lie ; and, see, the mould is loose.’

He ran for a spade which was stuck up in the ground

at some distance, and soon went to work and uncovered a parchment. Ghysbrecht saw it, and thrust him aside and went down on his knees and tore it out of the hole. His hands trembled and his face shone. He threw out parchment after parchment, and Jorian dusted them and cleaned them and shook them. Now, when Ghysbrecht had thrown out a great many, his face began to darken and lengthen, and when he came to the last he put his hands to his temples and seemed to be all amazed. Then a chill traversed his frame.

‘What mystery lies here?’ he gasped. ‘Are fiends mocking me? Dig deeper! There *must* be another!’

Jorian drove the spade in and threw out quantities of hard mould. In vain. And even while he dug, his master’s mood had changed.

‘Treason! treachery!’ he cried. ‘You knew of this!’

‘Knew what, master, in heaven’s name?’

‘Caitiff, you knew there was another one worth all these twice told.’

‘’Tis false!’ cried Jorian, made suspicious by the other’s suspicion. ‘’Tis a trick to rob me of my hundred crowns. Oh! I know you, Burgomaster.’ And Jorian was ready to whimper.

A sweet voice fell on them both like oil upon the waves. ‘No, good man, it is not false, nor yet is it quite true: there was another parchment.’

‘There, there, there! Where is it?’

‘But,’ continued Margaret calmly, ‘it was not a town record (so you have gained your hundred crowns, good man): it was but a private deed between the Burgomaster here and my grandfather Flor——’

‘Hush, hush!’

‘—is Brandt.’

‘Where is it, girl? that is all we want to know.’

‘Have patience, and I shall tell you. Gerard read the title of it, and he said, “This is as much yours as the Burgomaster’s,” and he put it apart, to read it with me at his leisure.’

‘It is in the house, then?’ said the Burgomaster, recovering his calmness.

‘No, sir,’ said Margaret, gravely, ‘it is not.’ Then, in a broken voice, ‘You hunted—my poor Gerard—so hard—and so close—that you gave him—no time—to think of aught—but his life—and his grief.—The parchment was in his bosom, and he hath ta’en it with him.’

‘Whither, whither?’

‘Ask me no more, sir. What right have you to question me thus? It was for *your* sake, good man, I put force upon my heart, and bore to speak at all to this hard old man. For, when I think of the misery he has brought on *him* and me, the sight of him is almost more than I can bear:’ and she gave an involuntary shudder, and went away crying bitterly.

Remorse for the past, and dread of the future—the slow, but, as he now felt, the inevitable future—avarice and fear, all tugged in one short moment at this tough heart. Ghysbrecht hung his head, and his arms fell listless by his sides. A coarse chuckle made him start round, and there stood Martin Wittenhaagen leaning on his bow, and sneering from ear to ear. At sight of the man and his grinning face, Ghysbrecht’s worse passions awoke.

‘Ho! attack him, seize him, traitor and thief!’ cried he. ‘Dog, thou shalt pay for all.’

Martin, without a word, calmly produced the Duke’s pardon. Ghysbrecht looked and had not a word to say. Martin followed up his advantage.

‘The Duke and I are soldiers. He won’t let you

greasy burghers trample on an old comrade. He bade me carry you a message too.'

'The Duke send a message to me?'

'Aye! I told him of your masterful doings, of your imprisoning Gerard for loving a girl, and says he, "Tell him this is to be a king, not a burgomaster. I'll have no kings in Holland but one. Bid him be more humble, or I'll hang him at his own door——"'

Ghysbrecht trembled. He thought the Duke capable of the deed.

'"—as I hanged the Burgomaster of Thingembob." The Duke could not mind which of you he had hung, or in what part; such trifles don't stick in a soldier's memory, but he was sure he had hanged one of you for grinding poor folk, "and I'm the man to hang another," said the good Duke.'

These repeated insults from so mean a man, coupled with his invulnerability, shielded as he was by the Duke, drove the choleric old man into a fit of impotent fury: he shook his fist at the soldier, and tried to threaten him, but could not speak for the rage and mortification that choked him: then he gave a sort of screech, and coiled himself up in eye and form like a rattle-snake about to strike; and spat furiously upon Martin's doublet.

The thick-skinned soldier treated this ebullition with genuine contempt. 'Here's a venomous old toad! he knows a kick from this foot would send him to his last home; and he wants me to cheat the gallows. But I have slain too many men in fair fight to lift limb against anything less than a man: and this I count no man. What is it, in Heaven's name? An old goat's-skin bag full o' rotten bones.'

'My mule! my mule!' screamed Ghysbrecht.

Jorian helped the old man up, trembling in every joint. Once in the saddle, he seemed to gather in



a moment unnatural vigour ; and the figure that went flying to Tergou was truly weird-like and terrible : so old and wizened the face ; so white and reverend the streaming hair ; so baleful the eye ; so fierce the fury which shook the bent frame that went spurring like mad ; while the quavering voice yelled, ‘ I’ll make their hearts ache !—I’ll make their hearts ache !—I’ll make their hearts ache !—I’ll make their hearts ache ! All of them ! All !—all !—all ! ’

The black sheep sat disconsolate amidst the convivial crew, and eyed Hans Memling’s wallet. For more ease he had taken it off, and flung it on the table. How readily they could have taken out that letter and put in another. For the first time in their lives they were sorry they had not learned to write, like their brother.

And now Hans Memling began to talk of going, and the brothers agreed in a whisper to abandon their project for the time. They had scarcely resolved this, when Dierich Brower stood suddenly in the doorway, and gave them a wink.

They went to him. ‘ Come to the Burgomaster with all speed,’ said he.

They found Ghysbrecht seated at a table, pale and agitated. Before him lay Margaret Van Eyck’s handwriting. ‘ I have written what you desired,’ said he. ‘ Now for the superscription. What were the words ? did ye see ? ’

‘ We cannot read,’ said Cornelis.

‘ Then is all this labour lost,’ cried Ghysbrecht angrily. ‘ Dolts ! ’

‘ Nay, but,’ said Sybrandt, ‘ I heard the words read, and I have not lost them. They were, “ To Gerard Gerardssoen, these by the hand of the trusty Hans Memling with all speed.” ’

‘ ’Tis well. Now, how was the letter folded ? how big was it ? ’

‘ Longer than this one, and not so long as this. ’

‘ ’Tis well. Where is he ? ’

‘ At the hostelry. ’

‘ Come, then, take you this groat, and treat him. Then ask to see the letter, and put this in place of it. Come to me with the other letter. ’

The brothers assented, took the letter, and went to the hostelry.

They had not been gone a minute, when Dierich Brower issued from the Stadthouse, and followed them. He had his orders not to let them out of his sight till the true letter was in his master’s hands. He watched outside the hostelry.

He had not long to wait. They came out almost immediately, with downcast looks. Dierich made up to them.

‘ Too late ! ’ they cried ; ‘ too late ! He is gone ! ’

‘ Gone ! How long ? ’

‘ Scarce five minutes. Cursed chance ! ’

CHAPTER XXXI

‘ You must come to the Burgomaster at once, ’ said Dierich Brower.

‘ To what end ? ’

‘ No matter ; come : ’ and he hurried them to the Stadthouse.

Ghysbrecht Van Swieten was not the man to accept a defeat. ‘ Well, ’ said he, on hearing the ill news, ‘ suppose he is gone. Is he mounted ? ’

‘ No. ’

‘ Then what hinders you to come up with him ? ’

‘But what avails coming up with him ; there are no hostleries on the road he is gone.’

‘Fools!’ said Ghysbrecht, ‘is there no way of emptying a man’s pockets but liquor and sleight of hand?’

A meaning look, that passed between Ghysbrecht and Dierich, aided the brothers’ comprehension. They changed colour, and lost all zeal for the business.

‘No! no! we won’t get ourselves hanged to spite Gerard,’ said Sybrandt; ‘that would be a fool’s trick.’

‘Hanged?’ cried Ghysbrecht. ‘Am I not the Burgomaster? How can ye be hanged? I see how ’tis: ye fear to tackle one man, being two: hearts of hare, that ye are! Oh! why cannot I be young again? I’d do it single-handed.’

The old man now threw off all disguise, and showed them his heart was in this deed. He then flattered and besought, and jeered them alternately, but he found no eloquence could move them to an action, however dishonourable, which was attended with danger. At last he opened a drawer, and showed them a pile of silver coins.

‘Change but those letters for me,’ he said, ‘and each of you shall thrust one hand into this drawer and take away as many of them as you can hold.’

The effect was magical. Their eyes glittered with desire. Their whole bodies seemed to swell, and rise into male energy.

‘Swear it, then,’ said Sybrandt.

‘I swear it.’

‘No. On the crucifix.’

Ghysbrecht swore upon the crucifix.

The next minute the brothers were on the road, in pursuit of Hans Memling. They came in sight of him about two leagues from Tergou: but though they knew he had no weapon but his staff, they were

too prudent to venture on him in daylight ; so they fell back.

But being now three leagues and more from the town, and on a grassy road,—sun down, moon not yet up,—honest Hans suddenly found himself attacked before and behind at once by men with uplifted knives, who cried in loud though somewhat shaky voices, ‘Stand and deliver.’

The attack was so sudden, and so well planned, that Hans was dismayed. ‘Slay me not, good fellows,’ he cried : ‘I am but a poor man, and ye shall have my all.’

‘So be it then. Live ! But empty thy wallet.’

‘There is nought in my wallet, good friends, but one letter.’

‘That we shall see,’ said Sybrandt, who was the one in front. ‘Well : it *is* a letter.’

‘Take it not from me, I pray you. ’Tis worth nought, and the good dame would fret that writ it.’

‘There,’ said Sybrandt, ‘take back thy letter : and now empty thy pouch. Come ! tarry not !’

But by this time Hans had recovered his confusion : and, by a certain flutter in Sybrandt, and hard breathing of Cornelis, aided by an indescribable consciousness, felt sure the pair he had to deal with were no heroes. He pretended to fumble for his money : then suddenly thrust his staff firmly into Sybrandt’s face, and drove him staggering, and lent Cornelis a back-handed slash on the ear that sent him twirling : then whirled his weapon over his head and danced about the road like a man on springs, shouting ‘Come on, ye thieving loons ! Come on !’

By ‘come’ they understood ‘go’, and took to their heels directly, with Hans after them, he shouting ‘Stop thieves !’ and they howling with fear and pain as they ran.

CHAPTER XXXII

ABOUT this time a change passed over Margaret Brandt. She went about her household duties like one in a dream. If Peter did but speak a little quickly to her, she started and fixed two terrified eyes on him. She went less often to her friend Margaret Van Eyck, and was ill at her ease when there. Instead of meeting her warm old friend's caresses, she used to receive them passive and trembling, and sometimes almost shrink from them. But the most extraordinary thing was, she never would go outside her own house in daylight. When she went to Tergou it was after dusk, and she returned before daybreak. She would not even go to matins. At last Peter, unobservant as he was, noticed it, and asked her the reason.

‘THE FOLK ALL LOOK AT ME SO.’

One day, Margaret Van Eyck asked her what was the matter. A seared look and a flood of tears were all the reply: the old lady expostulated gently. ‘What, sweetheart, afraid to confide your sorrows to me?’

‘I have no sorrows, madam, but of my own making. I am kinder treated than I deserve—especially in this house.’

‘Then why not come oftener, my dear?’

‘I come oftener than I deserve:’ and she sighed deeply.

‘There, Richt is crying out for you,’ said Margaret Van Eyck; ‘go, child!—what on earth can it be?’

Turning possibilities over in her mind, she thought

Margaret must be mortified at the contempt with which she was treated by Gerard's family. 'I will take them to task for it, at least such of them as are women;' and the very next day she put on her hood and cloak, and followed by Richt went to the hosier's house. Catherine received her with much respect, and thanked her with tears for her kindness to Gerard. But when, encouraged by this, her visitor diverged to Margaret Brandt, Catherine's eyes dried, and her lips turned to half the size, and she looked as only obstinate, ignorant women can look. When they put on this cast of features, you might as well try to soften or convince a brick wall. Margaret Van Eyck tried, but all in vain. So then, not being herself used to be thwarted, she got provoked, and at last went out hastily with an abrupt and mutilated curtsy, which Catherine returned with an air rather of defiance than obeisance. Outside the door Margaret Van Eyck found Richt conversing with a pale girl on crutches. Margaret Van Eyck was passing them with heightened colour, and a scornful toss intended for the whole family, when suddenly a little delicate hand glided timidly into hers, and looking round she saw two dove-like eyes, with the water in them, that sought hers gratefully, and, at the same time, imploringly. The old lady read this wonderful look, complex as it was, and down went her choler. She stooped and kissed Kate's brow. 'I see,' said she. 'Mind, then, I leave it to you.' Returned home, she said,—'I have been to a house to-day where I have seen a very common thing and a very uncommon thing: I have seen a stupid, obstinate woman, and I have seen an angel in the flesh, with a face—if I had it here I'd take down my brushes once more, and try and paint it.'

Little Kate did not belie the good opinion so hastily formed of her. She waited a better opportunity, and told her mother what she had learned from Richt Heynes, that Margaret had shed her very blood for Gerard in the wood.

‘ See, mother, how she loves him. ’

‘ Who would not love him ? ’

‘ Oh, mother, think of it ! Poor thing ! ’

‘ Aye, wench. She has her own trouble, no doubt, as well as we ours. I can’t abide the sight of blood, let alone my own. ’

This was a point gained ; but when Kate had to follow it up she was stopped short.

About a month after this a soldier of the Dalgetty tribe, returning from service in Tuscany, brought a letter one evening to the hosier’s house. He was away on business : but the rest of the family sat at supper. The soldier laid the letter on the table by Catherine, and telling them he had his guerdon for bringing it, went off to Sevenbergen.

Although for a long time they had hoped and expected this, yet when it did come it took them by surprise.

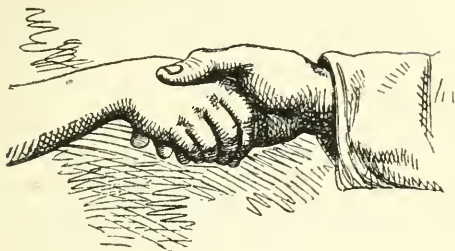
The letter was unfolded and spread out : and curiously enough, though not one of them could read, they could all tell it was Gerard’s handwriting.

‘ And your father must be away, ’ cried Catherine. ‘ Are ye not ashamed of yourselves ? not one that can read your brother’s letter ? ’

But although the words were to them what hieroglyphics are to us, there was something in the letter they could read. There is an art can speak without words : unfettered by the penman’s limits, it can steal through the eye into the heart and brain, alike of the learned and unlearned, and it can cross a frontier or a sea, yet lose nothing. It is at the

mercy of no translator: for it writes a universal language.

When, therefore, they saw this,



which Gerard had drawn with his pencil between the two short paragraphs of which his letter consisted, they read it, and it went straight to their hearts.

Gerard was bidding them farewell.

As they gazed on that simple sketch, in every turn and line of which they recognized his manner, Gerard seemed present, and bidding them farewell.

The women wept over it till they could see it no longer.

Giles said, 'Poor Gerard!' in a lower voice than seemed to belong to him.

Even Cornelis and Sybrandt felt a momentary remorse, and sat enjoying it gloomily.

But how to get the words read to them. They were loath to show their ignorance and emotion—both to a stranger.

'The Dame Van Eyck?' said Kate, timidly.

'And so I will, Kate. She has a good heart. She loves Gerard, too. She will be glad to hear of him. I was short with her when she came here, but

I will make my submission, and then she will tell me what my poor child says to me.'

She was soon at Margaret Van Eyck's house. Richt took her into a room, and said, 'Bide a minute ; she is at her orisons.'

There was a young woman in the room seated pensively by the stove ; but she rose and courteously made way for the visitor.

'Thank you, young lady ; the winter nights are cold, and your stove is inviting.' Catherine then, while warming her hands, inspected her companion furtively from head to foot, both inclusive. The young person wore an ordinary wimple, but her gown was trimmed with fur, which was, in those days, almost a sign of superior rank or wealth. But what most struck Catherine was the candour and modesty of the face. She felt sure of sympathy from so good a countenance, and began to gossip.

'Now, what think you brings me here, gay lady ? It is a letter : a letter from my poor boy that is far away in some savage part or other. And I take shame that none of us can read it. I wonder whether you can read ?'

'Yes.'

'Can ye, now ? It is much to your credit, my dear. I dare say she won't be long ; but every minute is an hour to a poor longing mother !'

'I will read it to you.'

'Bless you, my dear ; bless you !'

In her unfeigned eagerness she never noticed the suppressed eagerness with which the hand was slowly put out to take the letter. She did not see the tremor with which the fingers closed on it.

'Come, then, read it to me, prithee. I am wearying for it.'

'The first words are, "To my honoured parents."'

‘Aye ! and he always did honour us, poor soul.’

“God and the saints have you in his holy keeping, and bless you by night and by day. Your one harsh deed is forgotten ; your years of love remembered.”

Catherine laid her hand on her bosom, and sank back in her chair with one heart-broken sob.

‘Then comes this, madam. It speaks for itself. “A long adieu.”’

‘Aye, go on, bless you, girl ; you give me sorry comfort. Still, ’tis comfort.’

“To my brothers Cornelis and Sybrandt :—Be content. You will see me no more !”

‘What does that mean ? Ah ! has he seen what I have : or more.’

“To my sister Kate. Little angel of my father’s house. Be kind to *her*—” Ah !

‘That is Margaret Brandt, my dear,—his sweetheart, poor soul. I’ve not been kind to her. Forgive me, Gerard !’

“—for poor Gerard’s sake : since grief to her is death—to—me——” Ah !’ And nature, resenting the poor girl’s struggle for unnatural composure, suddenly gave way, and she sank from her chair and lay insensible, with her head on Catherine’s knees.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EXPERIENCED women are not frightened when a woman faints, nor do they hastily attribute it to anything but those physical causes which they have often seen produce it. Catherine bustled about ; laid the girl down with her head on the floor quite flat, opened the window, and unloosed her dress as she lay. Not till she had done all this did she step to the door and say, rather loudly :

‘Come here, if you please.’

Margaret Van Eyck and Richt came and found Margaret lying quite flat, and Catherine beating her hands.

‘Oh, my poor girl! What has happened?’

‘Nothing, madam; nothing more than is natural in her situation.’

‘My poor Margaret!’

‘Margaret? What, not Margaret Brandt?’

‘Yes! this is the poor girl you are so bitter against. She is coming to, thank Heaven.’

‘Me bitter? Well, so I was; but my heart is turned towards her somehow, as if she was my own child—all in one moment. What, sweetheart? Be not frightened, none are here but friends. And to think of my setting her to read me the letter—poor thing!’

They seated her in an easy chair. As the colour was creeping back to her face and lips, Catherine drew Margaret Van Eyck aside.

‘I would not let her go home to-night.’

To enforce this she whispered a few words. Margaret Van Eyck started at them, and without going out of a whisper, went into a passion.

‘It’s false! it is a calumny! it is monstrous! Look at her face. It is blasphemy to accuse such a face.’

‘Tut! tut! tut!’ said the other, ‘you might as well say this is not my hand. I ought to know. I have had a dozen, besides the numbers I have seen. I tell ye it is *so*.’

And much to Margaret Van Eyck’s surprise she went up to the girl, and, taking her round the neck, kissed her warmly. ‘I suffered for Gerard, and you shed your blood for him I do hear: his own words show me I have been to blame. I’ve held aloof from

you. But I'll make it up to you once I begin. You are my daughter from this hour.'

Another warm embrace sealed this hasty compact, and the woman of impulse was gone.

Margaret lay back in her chair, and a feeble smile stole over her face. Gerard's mother had kissed her and called her daughter; but the next moment she saw her old friend looking at her with a solemnity and sadness that were quite new.

She slid from her chair to her knees, and prayed piteously to the old dame for pardon. From the words and the manner of her penitence a bystander would have gathered she had inflicted some cruel wrong, and intolerable insult, upon her venerable friend.

The little party at the hosier's house sat at table discussing the recent event, when their mother returned, and casting a piercing glance all round the little circle, laid the letter flat on the table. She repeated every word of it, following the lines with her finger. Then, suddenly lifting her head, she cast another keen look on Cornelis and Sybrandt: their eyes fell.

Then the storm that had long been brewing burst on their heads.

Catherine seemed to swell like an angry hen ruffling her feathers, and out of her mouth came a Rhone and Saone of wisdom and twaddle, of great and mean invective, such as no male that ever was born could utter in one current; and not many women.

'I have long had my doubts that you blew the flame betwixt Gerard and your father, and set that old rogue, Ghysbrecht, on. And now here are Gerard's own written words to prove it. You have driven your own flesh and blood into a far land, and

robbed the mother that bore you of her darling, the pride of her eye, the joy of her heart. But you are all of a piece from end to end. When you were all boys together, my others were a comfort ; but you were a curse : mischievous and sly ; and it took a woman half her day to keep your clothes whole : for why ? work wears cloth, but play cuts it. With the beard comes prudence : but none came to you : still the last to go to bed, and the last to leave it ; and why ? because honesty goes to bed early, and industry rises betimes. Where there are two lie-abeds in a house there are a pair of ne'er-do-weels. Often I've sat and looked at your ways, and wondered where you came from : you don't take after your father, and you are no more like me than a wasp is to an ant ; sure you were changed in the cradle, or the cuckoo dropped ye on my floor : for you have not our hands, nor our hearts : of all my blood none but you ever jeered them that God afflicted ; but often when my back was turned I've heard you mock at Giles, because he is not so big as some ; and at my lily Kate (that is poor, dear Gerard's word), because she is not so strong as a Flanders mare. After that rob a church an you will ! for you can be no worse in His eyes that made both Kate and Giles, and in mine that suffered for them, poor darlings, as I did for you, you paltry, unfeeling, treasonable curs ! No I will not hush, my daughter ; they have filled the cup too full. It takes a deal to turn a mother's heart against the sons she has nursed upon her knees ; and many is the time I have winked and wouldn't see too much, and bitten my tongue, lest their father should know them as I do ; he would have put them to the door that moment. But now they have filled the cup too full. And where got ye all this money ? You never wrought for it. I wish

I may never hear from other mouths how ye got it. Sloth and greed are ill-mated, my masters. Lovers of money must sweat or steal. Well, if you robbed a traveller of it, it was some woman, I'll go bail; for a man would drive you with his naked hand. No matter; it is good for one thing. It has shown me how you will guide our gear if ever it comes to be yourn. I have watched you, my lads, this while. You have spent a groat a day between you. And I spend scarce a groat a week, and keep you all, good *and* bad. No! give up waiting for the shoes that will maybe walk behind your coffin; for this shop and this house shall never be yourn. Gerard is our heir: poor Gerard whom you have banished and done your best to kill; never call me mother again! But you have made him tenfold dearer to me. My poor lost boy! I shall soon see him again; shall hold him in my arms, and set him on my knees. Oh, you may stare! You are too clever, and yet not clever enough. You cut the stalk away; but you left the seed—the seed that shall outgrow you, and outlive you. Margaret Brandt is quick, and it is Gerard's, and what is Gerard's is mine; and I have prayed the saints it may be a boy: and it will—it must. Oh, Kate, when I found it was so, my bowels yearned over her child unborn as if it had been my own. He is our heir. He will outlive us. You will not. For a bad heart in a carcass is like the worm in a nut,—soon brings the body to dust. So, Kate, take down Gerard's bib and tucker that are in the drawer you wot of, and to-morrow we will carry them to Sevenbergen. We will borrow Peter Buyskens's cart and go comfort Gerard's wife under her burden. She is his wife. Who is Ghysbrecht Van Swieten? Can he come between a couple and the altar, and sunder those that God and the priest make one.

She is my daughter, and I am as proud of her as I am of you, Kate ; and as for *you*, keep out of my way awhile : for you are like the black dog in my eyes.'

Cornelis and Sybrandt took the hint and slunk out, aching with remorse, and impenitence, and hate.

They kept out of her sight for days, and she never spoke to them again about their conduct. *Liberaverat animam suam.*

CHAPTER XXXIV

GHYSBRECHT VAN SWIETEN heard no more of the black sheep for two days ; then they came and produced the letter they had taken from Hans Memling before he leathered them : and claimed their reward. The drawer was opened, and in went their hands. Sybrandt had slyly glued his without telling Cornelis ; for black sheep are not always loyal to one another. So some small coins stuck to the back of his hand, and he got more for his soul than his brother did. When they were gone Ghysbrecht opened the letter, and found, to his surprise, it was written by Margaret Brandt. In it the poor girl revealed her situation to her lover, and besought him tenderly to return and save her honour. Her love and her sorrow had found words so simple and touching that Ghysbrecht felt a deeper pang of remorse than ever, and cursed the hour he had fallen into the views of Cornelis and Sybrandt. But it was too late.

Hans was far away with the fatal letter to tell Gerard Margaret was dead.

While Ghysbrecht was in this state, he received a summons to answer a charge made against him by the bishop of the diocese, for entering a church

profanely, and interrupting the sacrament of marriage by force and arms, without due authority.

The Curé of Sevenbergen was a mild man and had submitted to that insult; but he related it months afterwards to others of the clergy, and they took it up instantly with ardour and an *esprit du corps* that boded ill for the lay defendant. Soon the lawyers had their word, and after much discussion they settled it thus: that on a special and written authority from the father of the bride or bridegroom the magistrate might stop a marriage even at the altar, provided he did it decently, and *sine strepitu*, and in a certain form, viz. by a writ first delivered to the officiating priest; but that, on a general authority, he could do no act of such weight, this being an interference with the clergy in their proper function, and *in domicilio sancto*. On the above particulars a month was given Ghysbrecht to furnish evidence. But this decision was in reality fatal to him. He had no written authority from Gerard senior. He had not done his act in the form by law prescribed, and by no means *sine strepitu*. Weighing this, and knowing from Martin Wittenhaagen that the Duke was prejudiced against him, he was deeply dejected. In which state a still heavier blow fell on him.

CHAPTER XXXV

GERARD, who had all his parents' economy, intended to make his pen defray the expenses of his journey. But when he got into Germany he found the art of printing universal, and so beautifully executed that he could not go beyond it. Besides,

Imprimit una dies quantum non scribitur anno.

He had the modesty and the sense to see that the best man can't buffet good machinery. He pushed on to Italy, afraid printing would get there before him. The Burgomaster's money enabled him to travel more quickly than most pedestrians, but when he got to Florence his funds had sadly dwindled. He found no printing to speak of at Florence, and a great demand for scribes.

But, alas ! the run was mainly upon Greek MSS., and Gerard, though he knew the Greek character, had no skill to write it. But he set to work with a will and practised it. When he had at last mastered it, he thought he would prepare a specimen of his powers, surrounded with a border of fruit and leaves. Should he buy a fair piece of vellum to lay it on ? No ; he was Catherine's son : why buy what he had by him ? that old deed was on fair vellum : it was dirty : but then he had a receipt for cleaning vellum. He laid the deed on the table, and took his knife to cut it in half, intending to glue the written faces of the two halves together, and so make a glorious solid sheet.

Now, as he bent over it, a word or two excited his curiosity. 'Gently,' said he, 'let me not destroy it till I know what it is—it belongs to *her*.'

Accordingly he read it, and, as he read it, his cheeks got hot, and his heart began to beat. When he had read it, he studied it, and, the more he studied it, the more sure he was that there was something much better to be done with it than copy Plutarch on it.

He sat reading and pondering it, and so absorbed that he missed the sight of a face from Holland. Hans Memling passed his little window twice, but Gerard never saw him.

At peep of day Gerard left Florence.

Friend and foe had shot at him with love and with hate, and each missed him alike. Neither Margaret's imploring cry to him to return reached him, nor did the false report of her death reach him, though it grazed so terribly near him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MARGARET stole away to Sevenbergen at peep of day. There she found the soldier had left her a long letter from Gerard. The thousand tender words of love filled her with joy. But the letter was dated from Florence. The distance filled her with dismay.

'Oh, Gerard!' she cried, 'why are you so far from me? What will become of me if you get not my letter? I shall die disgraced, for live ashamed I cannot.'

Soon after breakfast Catherine came, true to her promise, and was so warm, so cheerful, and motherly, that she revived the drooping flower. Little Kate was unable to come. She was in more pain than usual. From this time the visits of Catherine were frequent. Margaret's despondent state caused her considerable anxiety. She never would come to Tergou, and indeed would not leave the house.

'I held my head too high,' she said, 'and now I can look no one in the face. The Dame Van Eyck tries to forgive me, but she cannot. How can she? None can save me but one, and he comes not. Well-a-day!'

'I tell you,' said Catherine, 'you are his wife, and my daughter; and don't ye go fretting now, for the sake of the precious burden you are trusted with.'

But when it transpired publicly that the clergy

were proceeding against Ghysbrecht, Catherine came to Sevenbergen, buoyant with the news ; and as she told it with a fair share of exaggeration, it brought life into Margaret's pale face, for a moment or two.

One day, as Peter was reading and Margaret leaning her weary head on her new mother's bosom, and kissing her hand ; and the kind Catherine leaning her head down with assumed cheerfulness, but secret anxiety, over this her pining daughter, so dear to her now ; there stood in the doorway the figure of a man in rags, weary with travel, pale, large-eyed. Peter glanced off his book, and said :—

‘ Pass on, good man, we are too poor to give ! ’ then back to his book again.

There was a swift rush, a staff rattled on the floor, and the worn man was on his knees with his arms round both the women, speechless and panting with joy.

‘ Ah ! my darling ! my darling ! ’ cried his mother, as only a mother can cry ; and Margaret clung tight to him with one long moan of love, and sobbed, and laughed, and wept upon his neck.

But words have not the power to paint a joy so sudden, so wild, so all overpowering.

An hour later, Gerard sat between the two, a hand of each in his hand, and ever and anon kissing a cheek of each alternately, as he told his story.

‘ Dear Gerard, ’twas my letter brought you ? ’

‘ No, Margaret. I got no letter. ’Twas this brought me, this deed which shows me your father is a wealthy man ; his father's goods being wrongfully kept from him by Ghysbrecht Van Swieten. I only found it out at Florence. Was I to go on, and leave you in poverty, when I held this talisman to make you rich ? ’



‘I am rich in your love. I ask no more. Oh, mother! can this be real? Can any woman be so happy and live?’

‘Why not? What would she gain by dying? Gerard, you and I must talk about that deed: this one is too simple: and now quick to Tergou.’

‘Aye: but how can I leave Margaret so soon?’

‘Mother, he loves me still! I’ll come too, Gerard, sooner than the rest should want you.’

And Margaret was half an hour making the little changes in her clothes and hair, that of late had not kept her five minutes.

And she came down transformed: elastic; and radiant with beauty.

‘Good luck!’ cried Catherine. ‘We shall want no candle with this one in the room.’

And in Buyskens’s cart went Gerard in rags to Tergou, with a dear hand in each of his; the happiest he in Holland.

Arrived at Tergou, his Spartan sire fell on his neck and kissed him, and no word was uttered but of love and content: and little Kate’s face was seraphic, and her hand crept alternately into Margaret’s and Gerard’s.

And as they talked and sometimes sighed, sometimes rejoiced, over all their troubles now happily ended, their glistening eyes and nimble fingers were all busy making Gerard a suit of decent clothes. They hadn’t far to go for the cloth.

Next day, when Gerard went to ask the Curé to marry him, the reverend father observed:—

‘This has been discussed, and it is matter of great doubt whether you are not married. If so, it were a sin to repeat the ceremony: this were to throw doubt upon a sacrament.’

Gerard exclaimed and entreated, and at last it

was settled thus : No fresh banns ; the words the Curé had uttered last not to be repeated ; the service to be taken up from that point ; the marriage to be registered as having taken place at the first attempt, Ghysbrecht's interruption having been laic, profane, illegal, null. On these terms, the Curé consented to read the rest of the mutilated service—and to take the fees.

The piece of parchment was a covenant by which Ghysbrecht had advanced money, many years ago, to Floris Brandt on the security of certain lands and houses, Ghysbrecht to draw the rents until said sum should be repaid ; but, comparing the income with the debt and date of loan, it was clear it had been repaid this sixteen years, yet Ghysbrecht had quietly gone on holding the property without a rag of title-deed ; and, trusting to the learned Peter's stupidity, had set it afloat that he had *bought* it of Floris Brandt. Thus, not only the property was Peter's, but the back rents for many years. As for the title-deeds, Gerard rummaged the philosopher's house without much hope. 'He has cut them up for labels,' said he. Unjust ! they were detected innocuously lining a drawer which was full of the seeds of medicinal herbs, and really arranged with considerable method—the seeds.

Gerard's father was a shrewd man, and had many friends in Tergou. He and his party took the matter up, and threatened to indict Ghysbrecht if he did not instantly refund. These pressing him hard on one side, and the clergy, whom he had affronted, on the other, Ghysbrecht's ruin and disgrace impended. But the old fox contrived to give his foes the slip. He was found dead in his bed one morning, not without some suspicion of having hastened an exit desirable for himself and others. His heir, a distant

relative and a just man, deprecated scandal, and accounted to Peter, or rather to Gerard, his son-in-law and man of business, for every farthing due. Gerard and Margaret then removed to Rotterdam, taking with them Peter, who met with more honour in the city than in the village, and had the glory of curing several personages—among the rest a heathen belonging to the Duke. He lived to a great age, cherished tenderly by his good son and daughter. He soon ceased to be aware that they were not both his children by blood.

Gerard and Margaret, like many that meet in youth more than their share of trouble, enjoyed more happiness and tranquillity than fall to the usual lot of man.

The Duke, on the report of his giant, sent flaming messengers for Giles to come to court. Vain was all remonstrance. The Duke's word was law. Catherine made Giles ready, weeping bitterly. It was an irreparable loss. She could have spared Sybrandt or Cornelis : she had two black sheep ; but she had but one dwarf.

Giles was petted and bedizened, and invested with privileges. Item : on account of his small size he was permitted to speak the truth. It sounded so odd at Court. It is a disagreeable thing at best ; but he contrived to make it more so by bellowing it. Sybrandt achieved a broken neck without help of halter, I forget how. Cornelis, free from all rivals, and forgiven long ago by his mother, who clung to him more and more now all her brood was scattered, waited, and waited, and waited, for his parents' decease. But his mother's shrewd word came true : ere she and her mate wore out, this worthy rusted away. At sixty-five he lay dying of old age in his mother's arms, a hale woman of eighty-six. He had

lain unconscious a while ; but came to himself *in articulo mortis*, and seeing her near him, told her how he would transmogrify the shop and premises as soon as they should be his. 'Yes, my darling,' said the poor old woman, soothingly ; and in another minute he was clay. And that clay was followed to the grave by all the shoes he had waited for. After his death the old couple were lonely. Gerard guessed as much, and came for them, and made them sell their shop and goods, and live under his wing as he had once under theirs. His house was large, his heart was larger. He set them by his chimney-corner, and he and his good Margaret forced comforts on them they would by force of habit have denied themselves. They sat some years by Gerard's hearth, and fondled little heads, and smiled at one another, and spoke of early days ; and grew like one another ; and their wrinkled faces had still a beauty, for they shone with benignity : oh, happy end of lives well spent ! All the passions gone ; all the affections left. Good citizens they were, and good spouses ; they reared many children in probity and piety, and never did holy wedlock show holier or more lovely than in this aged, happy pair, whose solace it had been for threescore years and ten.

Long and long before this little Kate had left her trouble behind her. There was too much angel in her face for a long abode on earth. She smiled too in pain : another sign. Life gave her but few joys : so it was just that Death should come to her without his frown : and thus he came. She was seized with a sudden lassitude, and a cessation of that pain which had been her companion from infancy. Her mother tried to think this was a change for the better. But the gossips looked at her face, and shook their heads, and said, 'She is half way to the saints.' Thus pain-

less she lay two days, foretasting heaven. When she was near her end, she begged for Gerard's little boy : he was three years old. They brought him and set him on the bed : by this time she was past speaking : but she pointed to a drawer : they looked, and found the two gold pieces Gerard had given her years ago. Then she nodded her head towards the boy, and looked anxious lest they should not understand her. But they did : they put the tokens of the father's love, so faithfully guarded, into the boy's hands ; and, when she saw his little fingers close on them, she smiled content ; and so, having disposed of her little earthly treasures, she yielded her immortal jewel to God, and passed from earth so calmly none saw her go. Gerard begged to have her crutches, that she had changed so well for angel's pinions. And he set them in his oratory in form of a cross. For he said : ' They were my darling sister's crutches, but now they are the relics of a saint.'

His memory of her never waxed dim : when he was quite an old man he still spoke of her with tears in his eyes as of the one mortal creature he had known pure from all earthly dross.

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